

Comparison between the novel Mrs Dalloway by Virginia Woolf and the film The Hour...

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



With this work I want to analyse the novel in its main characteristics and to compare these elements to the way they are treated in the film which, although it is not a screen adaptation of the novel, can be seen as a great work on the book, and also one of the most particular ways to interpret it.

Adeline Virginia Stephen was born in London in 1882, the third of four brothers. Leslie Stephen, her father, began his career as a clergyman, but soon became agnostic and he took up journalism, becoming an important Victorian literary critic; he and his wife provided their children with a home of wealth and comfort.

Virginia's approach to her art was greatly influenced by the highly intellectual atmosphere she breathed at home.

During her lifetime she suffered through three major mental breakdowns; her compulsive drive to work, the fact of feeling herself overshadowed by her parents, combined with her fragile nature, contributed to these breakdowns.

The first crisis began after her mother's death in 1895: Virginia may have felt guilty over choosing her father as the favourite parent. Two years later, the death of Stella, her stepsister, born from Leslie's first marriage, made Virginia feel sick again.

The following years she began to write, until 1904, when her father died and she, overcome by the event, which caused her second mental breakdown and also an attempted suicide, moved to Bloomsbury.

Here she founded the Bloomsbury Group, a circle of intellectuals, including E. M. Forster, who shared values and emphasised the importance of subjectivity, aesthetic enjoyment, personal ties of affection and intellectual honesty. They were hostile to the dominant values of the period, and also challenged conventional literary and artistic tastes, becoming highly influential in the English intellectual life over forty years.

In 1910 she worked as a volunteer for Women's Suffrage: she was always interested in the problems of woman's emancipation.

In 1912 Virginia married Leonard Woolf, another member of the Bloomsbury Group, and he will be the stable presence she will need to control her moods during her whole life. Their marriage was a partnership, and some suggest they had no intercourse.

In 1913 she attempted suicide again, because of a third strong breakdown.

In 1917 she and her husband founded the Hogart Press, which published the best experimental works of the period and their own books; Leonard hoped that Virginia could bestow on the press the care she would have bestowed on children (after her third breakdown she had been advised she could not have become pregnant anymore).

In March 1941 Virginia left a suicide note behind for her husband before drowning herself in a nearby river: she feared her madness was returning and she would not be able to continue writing.

Her first novel was *The Voyage Out*; then she wrote *Night and Day*, *The Mark on the Wall*, *Jacob's Room*, *Monday or Tuesday*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To The Lighthouse*, *Orlando* (the surrealistic story of a man who lives several lives, one of which also as a woman), *A Room of One's Own* (one of the first and most passionate defences of women's right to be writers), *The Waves* (a novel-meditation on the passing of time), *The Years* and *Between the Acts*.

In total, she accumulated a treasure chest of work, containing five volumes of collected essays (including *The Common Reader*, her first series of essays on literature) and reviews, two biographies, two libertarian books, a volume of selections from her diary, nine novels, and a volume of short stories.

Introduction to the novel

This novel is the result of an expansion of the themes already developed in *Jacob's Room*, adding to them that of insanity, and it is also a natural development of the short stories she wrote before deciding to make her character, Mrs Dalloway, into a full novel.

The Dalloways, Richard and Clarissa, had been introduced in *The Voyage Out* and some of the characters of the novel are taken from Virginia's past: Clarissa was modeled after a friend of hers, named Kitty Maxse, whom Woolf thought to be a superficial socialite, Sally Saton was based on Madge Symons, towards whom she held an affectionate devotion, and Septimus Smith is often considered as the character who reveals, in the novel, Virginia's manic depression.

Virginia originally planned to have Clarissa die or commit suicide at the end of the novel, but finally she decided to make Septimus die: this decision let her relatives see in it, after Virginia's death, the omen of her suicide.

As the novel focused mainly on Clarissa, Woolf, before publishing it, changed the title of the novel to Mrs Dalloway from its more abstract working title, *The Hours*.

The events narrated in *Mrs Dalloway* take place on a single day in June 1923, in London.

The novel starts with Clarissa Dalloway, the heroine, going out to buy flowers for the party she's going to give on the evening; while she is in Bond Street, she meets Hugh Whitbread, a friend of her since her childhood, who has become a proper English gentleman and who feels he makes an important contribution to society by writing letters to the *London Times*. Hugh is going to see his wife Eveline, who is in hospital, admitted because of her continuous health problems, and when Clarissa meets him, she immediately invites him to the party.

After that Clarissa begins to think about Peter Walsh, her boyfriend before she married Richard, and about her daughter's relationship with Miss Kilman, whom Richard has hired to tutor Elisabeth, their daughter, in history, and whom Clarissa hates because of the attention she takes from Elisabeth.

While she is at Mulberry's florist, a sudden pistol-like noise comes from the street; it comes from a motorcar, likely carrying someone very important. At

this moment, for the first time, Septimus and his wife Rezia appear in the story.

Septimus was once, before the war, a successful, intelligent, literary young man and, during the war, he also showed great courage and commitment, but then, after a good friend of his, Evans, is killed in action, he realized he could not longer feel. Marrying Rezia, an Italian girl, he attempted to move on, but he never regained an emotional attachment to the world; he also began to hear voices, namely of Evans, and he became extremely sensitive to color and natural beauty. The doctors who are now trying to help him, first Dr. Holmes and then Dr. Bradshaw, compound his problems by ignoring them, and they become the embodiment of evil in Septimus's mind.

At this point of the novel, Septimus and Rezia are both surprised to see an airplane flying and making incomprehensible letters out of smoke; at this point we also meet Maisie Johnson, a young woman from Scotland who is horrified by the look she noticed in Septimus's eyes while she's asking him for some street indication.

Through Clarissa's train of thoughts, we understand she feels snubbed because of the invitation to lunch Lady Bruton had made to her husband only, excluding her. She also comes back with her memory to her old best friend, Sally Saton, with whom she had shared her childhood and her adolescence in Bourton and who is now married with a wealthy man in Manchester.

Then Clarissa comes back home and, while she's mending her dress, Peter Walsh suddenly enters, and they begin to speak about their youth, with a great nostalgia for both. Peter reveals to her that he is going to marry an Indian girl and that he has come back to London, after five years in India, only to take advice from his lawyers about the divorce Diana, this Indian girl, is arranging with her husband.

After a moment of deep mood, Elisabeth enters and Peter goes away.

The novel now concentrates on Peter's thoughts, and through them we understand his pain, still suffocating, caused by Clarissa's refusal to marry him in their youth: he never forgot this, because he still loves her.

The point of view shifts again, entering into Rezia's mind: she wonders why she must suffer so much because of Septimus's mental insanity, but, suddenly, a song rising from the subway station makes her abandon these troubles, she turns to see her husband, and she notices that he looks very well, strangely calm, as if he had never been ill.

At noon, Dr. Bradshaw goes to see Septimus at home and he says to him that he needs a long rest in the country to regain a sense of proportion.

The novel now concentrates again on Hugh Whitbread, who is going to Lady Bruton's luncheon: here he also meets Richard, and Lady Bruton asks both to help her to write to the London Times on the topic of emigration to Canada. After that, Richard invites her to Clarissa's party.

Coming back home, Richard decides to buy flowers for his wife, as he hadn't shown her his love for a long time but, when he walks in with flowers, the only thing his wife shows to be interested in is her recent meeting with Peter, and Richard runs to work.

After having shown us Elisabeth and Miss Kilman shopping and then Elisabeth deciding to take a bus and enjoying the town alone, the point of view shifts another time in Rezia's mind: she's listening to Septimus, he looks very happy and, because of that, she makes a promise to herself: no one would separate her from him.

But, suddenly, Dr. Holmes arrives; she runs to stop him from seeing Septimus, she wants her husband to continue to feel calm and not to be disturbed by the doctors.

But it is too late: Septimus, having heard the doctor arrive, in a moment of total delirium, throws himself from the window onto the fence below.

After this very tragic moment Peter appears in the story: he never stops thinking about Clarissa and he decides to attend her party.

In the last section of the book, the author concentrates on the party: all the guests, Peter, Ellie Henderson, Lady Rosseter, Sally Saton, the Prime Minister, Lady Bruton, Elena (Clarissa's old aunt) arrive and Clarissa greets each one with great joy. Elena begins to talk with Peter and, when Lady Bradshaw arrives, she immediately tells Clarissa about a young man, a patient of her husband, who had killed himself. Clarissa, even if with no

reason, begins to think about that man, towards whom she feels sympathetic.

During the party, Peter keeps waiting for her, with an unbelievable desire to talk to her, but this moment never arrives and, during a little conversation with Sally, he admits his relationship with Clarissa had scarred his life.

The Sea as symbol of Life:

in the novel, when the image of the sea is portrayed as being harmonized, it represents a great confidence and comfort; when its image is presented as disjointed or uncomfortable, it symbolizes loneliness and fear.

Doubling:

many critics describe Septimus as Clarissa's "double", the darker, more internal personality compared to Clarissa's very social outlook. The doubling portrays the polarity of the self and exposes the positive-negative relationship between the individual and the whole humanity.

The intersection between Time and the Timeless:

In Mrs Dalloway, Woolf creates a new narrative structure: in it there's no distinction between dream and reality, between past and present. The narration flows simultaneously from the conscious to the unconscious, from the memory to the actual moment.

Social commentary:

Woolf also strived to illustrate the vain artificiality of Clarissa's life: the detail given in one day of a woman organizing a party exposes the flimsy lifestyle of England's upper classes at the time of the novel. Even though Clarissa is bombarded by profound thoughts, she's also a woman for whom a party is her greatest offering to society.

The world of the sane and of the insane side by side:

Woolf portrays the sane grasping for significant and substantial connections to life, living among those who have been cut off from such connections and who suffer because of the improper treatment they receive.

Feminism:

Woolf greatly admired strong women, to whom she looked at in order to give personality to her characters. This admiration for some women she knew during her life, as for example the novelist Madge Symonds (Sally Saton), was coupled with a growing dislike for the male domination in society; this was caused by Virginia's relationship with her stepbrother, who was fourteen when she was born.

Virginia Woolf is of a great importance in the history of the novel because of her experiments with narration, characterisation and style. She deliberately rejected what for many readers was the main aim of the novel, namely the telling of a story. For her, events were not important in themselves, but in the impression they made on the characters who experienced them.

Also in Mrs Dalloway she valued the subjectivity more highly than the objectivity of events: because of that, she refused to use an omniscient narrator and she introduced a shifting point of view, revealing thoughts, sensations and impressions experienced by the characters.

The technique used, which aims at reproducing the flow of thoughts in an individual mind and to portray human consciousness, is called Stream of Consciousness.

Her novel involves constant shifting backwards and forwards in time according to the recollections aroused in her characters. Her fiction is characterised by two levels of narration, one of external events arranged in chronological order and one of the flux of thoughts arranged according to the association of ideas.

Her prose is built through few subordinate sentences, the plot focuses on the internal feelings and covers a very brief period of time, the language is figurative and evocative, rich in objects and events with a symbolical meaning.