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## MRS. CLARISSA DALLOWAY IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MRS. DALLOWAY

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### ABSTRACT

Virginia Woolf has achieved a splendid result in writing the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, she has carried her technique to its highest level of achievement and has shown the artistic portrayal of life through her characters. She has sharp eyes through which she could search the different hidden layers of the strange workings of the human mind. Here the whole pattern is set within a single day in June between Mrs. Dalloway's preparation of the party in the morning and her presidency over the party and enjoying it with the guests in the evening. In this little span, Mrs. Dalloway's whole past and present history with her physical and psychic experiences are rendered brilliantly by Virginia Woolf.

**KEYWORDS:** Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway,

### INTRODUCTION:

In Mrs. Dalloway, Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway is the key figure, the focal point round whom all the action is centered. She is a woman in her fifties, the wife of a successful member of parliament Mr. Richard and the mother of young Elizabeth. We meet Clarissa Dalloway stepping out into a London street to buy flowers for her party. We share with her the world of London morning and the world of her memories.

### As Dorothy Brewster remarks about Clarissa:

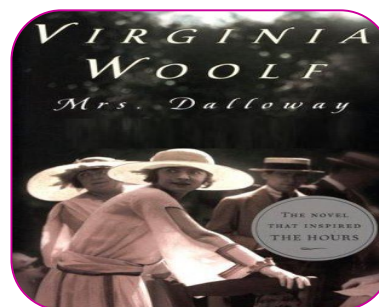
"Clarissa is less interesting as a person than Mrs. Ramsay or the unfinished Rachel or perhaps too finished Katherine Hilbery. But she is a sharply clear figure emerging most successfully from the pattern." (1) A single day in the life of Clarissa – her preparation for the party and enjoying it in the evening – is described. The major event of her day is the return of Peter Walsh. When she goes to buy flowers, she remembers her past and her friends and Peter Walsh – her lover once she loved.

Many people pass through her memories including her husband, Miss Kilman, her daughter Elizabeth and Peter Walsh. Her mind moves freely like a flowing stream over past experiences. Virginia Woolf allows us to enter the life of Clarissa. Clarissa's memories open the inner layer of her vast area of experiences. She works in the political field but takes no interest in it. She has an outstanding individuality in spite of her ordinariness. We see her as a wife, a mother, a woman and a hostess. Thus she has a many faceted personality. The whole novel revolves around her. While thinking about the past, she catches a glimpse of the infinite. She says, "Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind." (2)

It is her nature to enjoy and she enjoys life fully. She loves to hear people talking to her in the parties. She expresses her thoughts about life.

"For heaven only knows, -- why one loves it so,  
How one sees it so – creating it every moment a fresh." (3)

She enjoys life, yet she seems to be dissatisfied with it. She remembers her friends Peter and Sally Seton with whom she had intimacy. She remembers how she chose Richard to marry instead of Peter. In her young age, she is much attached to Sally Seton. Sally loves



her and their love appears a sort of “Lesbian Love”. Clarissa also feels attached to Sally. Sally kisses Clarissa on her lips and does not feel any sense of guilt in it. But at present, when Clarissa looks back on her friendship with Sally, she finds impure. It is always her nature to choose the secured and comfortable. She has strong sense of independence. So she refuses Peter – her lover and marries Richard. But she never regrets it as she needs security and secondly Peter would not allow her the independence which Richard has given her.

But as a result of it, she leads a false married life. Her marriage with Richard is only a social and false formality. She still loves Peter. And in spite of it, she believes that the decision which she had taken in the past was right. Her choice shows what kind of a woman she is. Yet it is also true that her love for Peter is a part of her being. She is legally married to Richard. And has a psychic affinity for Peter. So if we ignore the legality of marriage, she can be very well described as Mrs. Peter Walsh and not as Mrs. Dalloway. Perhaps she compromises by suppressing and controlling her feelings.

**The following line describe how she loves Peter and is excited when he comes,**

“So surprised she was to see him, so glad so shy so utterly taken aback to have Peter Walsh come to her unexpectedly in the morning.” (4)

Thus she is emotionally alive as far as love is concerned. Her love for Peter may not be of sexual nature and yet it is loyal. She does not marry him because of his possessive love. His egoism would not have given her, her own existence. We can understand the reason for her rejection of Peter when we read her thoughts.

“ There is a dignity in people, even between husband and wife, a gulf that one must respect for one would not part with it..... without losing one’s independence, one’s self respect.” (5)

So, for the sake of her independence and self respect, she does not hesitate to sacrifice her intimate love for Peter. She gives preference to her sense of freedom and security. It is this, that makes her reject Peter. But in doing so, she deceives herself.

Now she wants to be faithful to Richard. She accepts and admires Richard’s practical views of life. But she feels that she is unable to behave with him as warmly as a wife should. Outwardly her married life seems to be happy. But there is a conflict in her mind which fills her with inner unhappiness and emptiness. So she suffers from spiritual anguish. She discovers emptiness, purposelessness at the heart of life. She cannot differentiate between comfort and real happiness and so becomes the victim of hollow life.

There is more understanding than love between Clarissa and Richard. So she does not mind when lady Bruton calls only Richard to lunch. She arranges parties but does it in a business like manner. So she cannot enjoy them. With her, these routine parties have become mechanical and the signs of artificiality of her life. Perhaps she has suppressed her personality to please her husband. So she suffers from a sense of loneliness, and feels that she is insignificant in the sea of people.

At the same time, her capacity to enjoy life is also noteworthy. Her intense sense of duty makes her hate all that is ugly. So she hates Miss Doris Kilman – her daughter’s tutor and does not invite her cousin Ellie Henderson to her party. She does not like domination of one person over another. So she hates Miss Kilman’s domination over her daughter Elizabeth. She suspects Kilman’s interest in Elizabeth. She thinks that Kilman is taking away the love of her daughter from her. She feels upset because Elizabeth spends much time with Kilman. She suspects that Miss Kilman tries to steal Elizabeth from her. So she has a strong passion of hatred for Miss Kilman. She does not like the possessive love but she tries to impose the same upon her daughter Elizabeth. So she introduces Elizabeth to Peter Walsh in an awkward manner,

“Here is my Elizabeth.” (6)

Thus she tells Peter Walsh that Elizabeth is the main thing in her gain. It shows how Clarissa is proud of her daughter Elizabeth, though Elizabeth does not get on well with her. She does not devote her life to bring up Elizabeth. She fails to build up the mutual understanding and the delicate emotional relationship between her daughter Elizabeth and herself. She becomes unsuccessful as a mother.

Clarissa has a deep intuitive feeling about death. At the core of every feeling, saying and doing, there is fear. When the party is over, she comes to know about the death of Septimus Warren Smith----- the man who has thrown himself from the window. She realizes that there are people like him who could throw their life. She has this innate courage and desire for death in her. So she experiences Septimus's death. Her words express her desire how she yearns for death. She says,

“If it were now to die, it were now to be most happy”. (7)

Clarissa senses a spiritual contact with Septimus, whom she has never seen or known. It is a contact of despair. She realizes the futility of life. She admires Septimus when he commits suicide. To her, death seems better than suffering---- the slow decline which is reality in life. This is how Virginia Woolf describes

### Clarissa's feelings at this time:

“She felt somehow very like him---- the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it, thrown it away while they went on living.” (8)

Thus she feels a strong connection with Septimus. Her attention turns over and over again to the thoughts of death. She is preoccupied with death. So she realizes the meaning of death: death as the final surrender of personality. She identifies herself with Septimus. She feels sympathy with his desperate bid to throw himself out of life.

Clarissa is identified with Septimus as Septimus seems to be the part of herself. Clarissa feels as if the suicide of Septimus was her own disaster, her own death. The only difference is that she does not lose her awareness of the outside world like Septimus. She recognizes that defiance of death is the only way to end the frightful isolation of the individual soul. Death is the total release from any fear of it. Clarissa's identification with Septimus is the climax of her life and career.

Virginia Woolf completes here Clarissa's personality by showing her identification with the dead, unknown man. She shows Clarissa's love of life and fear of life. Clarissa enjoys life and at the same time likes to lose it. Her pathos is deep. We find that she never laughs anytime in the entire narration. Virginia Woolf describes Clarissa's restless and confused mind in a beautiful way. She paints minutely Clarissa's wish to be the part of everflowing life and also her fear of being swallowed by death.

Virginia Woolf represents her own society through Clarissa Dalloway. The deadness of Clarissa's soul reflects the nature of her society. Virginia Woolf shows through Clarissa Dalloway that death is a significant part of life. Virginia Woolf has a disliking for glamorous ladies who lack genuine stuff. Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway calls the upper class ladies to her party but she feels some sort of remoteness from them. She wants to be aloof and hidden. Here Virginia Woolf uses Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway as an instrument and as an example of spiritual emptiness. Clarissa lacks the purpose of life. Apparently she is happy and loves life and tries to make it good but it is aimless and meaningless. So she feels sad without any specific cause. Virginia Woolf presents the purposelessness of modern civilization through the lack of aim, meaning and purpose of life that Clarissa experiences. She criticizes the hypocrisy of upper class people which is hidden beneath the layer of descent manners.

Clarissa lacks the depth of feelings. Though she gains economic security, she loses the spiritual solace and warmth of love in her life. Her world is a spiritual wasteland. Perhaps she gives parties to forget her spiritual emptiness. Virginia Woolf has shown beautifully the void in the life of Clarissa. Clarissa has utter worldliness, which fascinates us. She has no bitterness and repulsion. Virginia Woolf paints the death of Clarissa's spirit in glittering triviality and here lies her skill.

### NOTES –

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