Mrs Dalloway

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf was born into a literate, wealthy family in London, the second to last among several siblings and half-siblings. Her mother and half-sister died in her youth, leading to Woolf's first nervous breakdown. Woolf was educated and extremely well-read, but she was never given the university opportunities her brothers were. Her father's death and her subsequent sexual abuse by her half-brothers contributed to Woolf's mental illness. She became friends with several notable intellectuals including John Maynard Keyes, Clive Bell, and Leonard Woolf, and this social circle was soon known as the Bloomsbury Group. Woolf married Leonard Woolf in 1912, but she also had an influential affair with the writer Vita Sackville-West. Woolf was a prolific writer, producing essays, lectures, stories, and novels until the year of her death. Her works helped shape modernist literature, psychology, and feminism, and she is considered one of the greatest lyrical writers of the English language. Woolf committed suicide at age 59.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Mrs Dalloway takes place in June of 1923. World War I ended in 1918, and though the United Kingdom was technically victorious in the war, hundreds of thousands of soldiers died fighting and the country suffered huge financial losses. In 1922 much of Ireland seceded from the United Kingdom, and many of Britain's colonies would reach independence in the decades following, including India, where Peter Walsh returns from. *Mrs Dalloway* critiques the conservatism and traditionalism of the upper classes at the time, while also portraying the tragedy of the "lost generation" following World War I, like Septimus as a victim of PTSD.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

A work that parallels and possibly influenced *Mrs Dalloway* was James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which was another famous modernist text that follows several characters' streams of consciousness over the course of one day. Woolf was studying classical Greek works like the *Odyssey* while she composed *Mrs Dalloway*, and she especially saw *Antigone* as an important work of feminine protest. Woolf's most famous female predecessors in English literature were Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, and George Eliot.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Mrs Dalloway*
- **When Written:** 1922-24
- **Where Written:** London and Sussex
- **When Published:** 1925
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Modernist Fiction
- **Setting:** London, England
- **Climax:** Clarissa learns of Septimus's suicide
- **Antagonist:** Dr. Holmes, Sir William Bradshaw
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient, free indirect discourse

EXTRA CREDIT

Other Mrs. Dalloways. Characters named "Mrs. Dalloway" also appear in Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* and in five of her stories, though they don't all seem to be the same woman.

The Hours. One of Woolf's original titles for the novel was "The Hours," and Michael Cunningham wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel with this title in 1998. This book, which concerns three women whose lives are affected by *Mrs. Dalloway*, was then made into an Oscar-winning movie of the same name.

PLOT SUMMARY

All the action of *Mrs. Dalloway* takes place in London during one day and night in mid-June, 1923. **Clarissa Dalloway** is an upper-class housewife married to **Richard**, a politician in the Conservative Party. Clarissa is throwing a party that night, and in the morning she walks about London on her way to get flowers. She enjoys the small sensations of daily life and often muses on her late teenage years at Bourton, her family's country home. She passes a car bearing an unknown but important personage, and an airplane sky writing an advertisement.

Clarissa returns home and is visited by **Peter Walsh**, an old friend from Bourton who has been in India for years. Peter was once passionately in love with Clarissa, but she rejected his offer of marriage. Peter and Clarissa have always been very close but also very critical of each other, and their brief meeting is laden with shared memories. Peter leaves when Clarissa's daughter **Elizabeth** enters, and he walks to Regent's Park, thinking about Clarissa's refusal of his marriage offer. He follows a young woman, idealizing her from afar.

The point of view shifts to **Septimus Warren Smith**, a veteran of World War I who is suffering from shell shock. Septimus and his Italian wife, **Lucrezia**, wait in Regent's Park. Septimus

imagines that he is a kind of prophet and has hallucinations of his dead soldier friend **Evans**. Septimus was once an aspiring poet, but after the war he became numb and unable to feel. He believes his lack of emotion is a crime for which the world has condemned him to death, and he is often suicidal. Lucrezia has been taking Septimus to **Dr. Holmes**, who is convinced that Septimus has nothing wrong with him and is "in a funk." That afternoon the Smiths visit **Sir William Bradshaw**, a famous doctor who subscribes to a worldview of "proportion" and is a psychological bully to his patients. Sir William plans to send Septimus to a mental institution in the country.

Richard Dalloway has lunch with **Lady Bruton**, a descendant of famous generals, and **Hugh Whitbread**, a shallow but charming aristocrat. The men help Lady Burton write a letter about emigration. After lunch Richard gets roses for Clarissa and plans to tell her he loves her, but when he sees her finds he cannot say it out loud. Clarissa considers the privacy of the soul and the gulf that exists between even a husband and a wife. Richard leaves and Elizabeth emerges with **Doris Kilman**, her history tutor. Doris Kilman is poor, unattractive, and bitter, and has been trying to convert Elizabeth to Christianity. Miss Kilman and Clarissa hate each other and are jealous of the other's influence on Elizabeth. Miss Kilman and Elizabeth go shopping and then Elizabeth leaves, leaving Miss Kilman to wallow in hatred and self-pity.

Septimus grows suddenly lucid while Lucrezia is making a hat. The couple designs the hat and jokes together, sharing a moment of happiness. Then Dr. Holmes arrives to visit Septimus. Lucrezia tries to stop him, but Holmes pushes past her. Septimus thinks of Holmes as a monster condemning him to death, and Septimus jumps out the window, killing himself as an act of defiance.

Peter hears the ambulance go by and marvels at it as a symbol of English civilization. He lingers at his hotel and then goes to Clarissa's party, where most of the novel's upper-class characters eventually assemble. Clarissa acts as a "perfect hostess" but is worried the party will fail, and she is aware of Peter's silent criticism. **Sally Seton**, a woman Clarissa had loved passionately as a teen at Bourton, arrives unexpectedly. The once-radical Sally has married a rich man and settled down. The Prime Minister visits briefly but his appearance is anticlimactic. Sir William Bradshaw arrives late, and his wife tells Clarissa about Septimus's suicide. Clarissa goes off alone to consider the sudden arrival of death at her party, and she feels a kinship with Septimus. She admires the purity of his soul and considers her own often shallow existence. She sees Septimus's suicide as an act of communication. Peter and Sally reminisce, waiting for Clarissa to join them. Clarissa finally appears and Peter is filled with ecstasy and terror.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Clarissa Dalloway – The novel's eponymous protagonist, a middle-aged, upper-class lady throwing a party. Clarissa is married to the conservative politician Richard Dalloway but is deeply affected by her past love for Sally Seton and her rejection of Peter Walsh, and she often dwells on the past. Clarissa is sociable and loves life, especially the small moments and sensations of the everyday. At the same time she is constantly aware of death and feels that there is a great danger in living even one day. Clarissa considers the privacy of the soul the heart of life, but she also loves communicating with others and throwing parties, bringing people together, which she considers to be her great gift. Though she is intelligent and was once radical, she has grown conventional in middle age, and others sometimes think her frivolous.

Septimus Warren Smith – A World War I veteran in his thirties, Septimus suffers from shell shock, or PTSD. He was once an aspiring poet, but after enlisting in the war for idealistic reasons and the death of his close friend and officer Evans, Septimus became unable to feel emotion. He married Lucrezia while stationed in Milan. Septimus feels condemned by human nature and is often suicidal and thinks that he has been condemned by the world to die for his failure to feel. In his more intense hallucinations he imagines himself surrounded by flames, or as a prophet with a divine message. Though the two characters never meet, Clarissa and Septimus act as doubles in the novel.

Peter Walsh – Clarissa's closest friend who was once passionately in love with her. They are intellectually very similar, but always critical of each other. Clarissa rejected Peter's proposal of marriage, which has haunted him all his life. He lived in India for years and often has romantic problems with women. Peter is critical of everyone, indulges in long fantasies and musings, and constantly plays with his pocketknife.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Richard Dalloway – Clarissa's husband, a Conservative politician in Parliament. Richard is a relatively simple, uninteresting man, but he is kind, philanthropic, and loves his wife and daughter.

Hugh Whitbread – Clarissa's old friend from Bourton, the epitome of English charm, tradition, and conservative values. He is vain, pompous, and always well-dressed. Clarissa and Lady Bruton think him kind, but Peter and Sally hate him and what he stands for.

Lucrezia Smith (Rezia) – Septimus's twenty-four-year-old wife, an Italian woman who left Milan to marry Septimus. She is a

skilled hatmaker and usually a playful, loving woman, but grows unhappy and lonely as Septimus's mental illness increases.

Sally Seton – A woman whom Clarissa loved passionately as a teen at Bourton. Sally was once radical and bombastic, and she and Clarissa shared a kiss that Clarissa considers the highlight of her life. Sally ends up marrying a rich man and having five boys.

Elizabeth Dalloway – Clarissa's seventeen-year-old daughter, a quiet girl who prefers the country and dogs to London and parties. She has an exotic beauty that is beginning to attract attention. She respects both her mother and Miss Kilman, but recognizes their differences.

Doris Kilman – Elizabeth's history tutor, a poor, unattractive woman who always wears a mackintosh. Miss Kilman is bitter and self-pitying, constantly feeling that she has been robbed of happiness. She is very religious and tries to convert Elizabeth to Christianity. Miss Kilman hates Clarissa but loves Elizabeth possessively.

Sir William Bradshaw – A famous London psychiatrist. Sir William subscribes to the worldview of "proportion," and he bullies his patients into converting to his views, all while ingratiating himself to everyone else. He recommends that Septimus be separated from Rezia and sent to an institution.

Lady Bruton – An elderly upper-class lady who is descended from a famous general. She is friends with Richard Dalloway, who admires her strength and respectability. Lady Bruton is traditional, conservative, and devoted to the idea of emigration to Canada.

Dr. Holmes – A general practitioner who treats Septimus. Holmes claims that Septimus is perfectly healthy, just "in a funk", and needs to get a hobby. Septimus comes to despise Holmes and thinks of him as the embodiment of repulsive human nature.

Aunt Helena – Clarissa's aunt who has one glass eye, a relic of an older, stricter English society. Aunt Helena was a botanist and likes to talk about Burma and orchids. She finds Sally's youthful behavior appalling, especially Sally's penchant for cutting off the heads of flowers.

Ellie Henderson – Clarissa's poor, dull cousin. Ellie is socially awkward and shy, but she enjoys watching the influential people at Clarissa's party. She has a companion named Edith.

Evans – Septimus's friend and officer in World War I. The two became very close, possibly even falling in love, but then Evans was killed. Septimus subsequently loses the ability to feel, and eventually starts hallucinating Evans's presence.

Lucy – One of the Dalloway servants who idolizes Clarissa.

Evelyn Whitbread – Hugh's wife, a wealthy lady who is perpetually ill.

Lady Bradshaw – Sir William's wife. She was once an independent woman but had her will subsumed into her husband's fifteen years before.

The Prime Minister – The head of the British Cabinet. In the novel the **Prime Minister** acts as a symbol of outdated tradition and conservatism. He briefly visits Clarissa's party.

Daisy Simmons – Peter's lover in India, a twenty-four-year-old woman who is married to an Army Major.

Lady Bexborough – A woman Clarissa idolizes. She is dark and imposing, and once opened a bazaar.

Miss Pym – The owner of the **flower** shop. Clarissa did her an unknown favor in the past.

Maisie Johnson – A young woman visiting London from Edinburgh, who finds the big city strange.

The old woman across the way – Clarissa's neighbor. Clarissa watches the old woman in the privacy of her own room and is comforted about the independence of the soul.

The old woman singing – An old woman begging for change and singing a song about love and death.

Milly Brush – Lady Bruton's assistant, a charmless woman who hates Hugh but likes Richard.

Mrs. Filmer – The Smiths' neighbor, Rezia's only friend in London.

Miss Isabel Pole – A poet and Shakespeare teacher whom Septimus loved before the war.

Mrs. Dempster – An older woman who regrets her youth.

Elise Mitchell – A little girl who runs into Lucrezia's legs.

Sylvia – Clarissa's sister, who was killed by a falling tree.

Edith – Ellie Henderson's unexplained companion, possibly her partner.

Mr. Brewer – Septimus's boss before World War I, at the firm of "Sibleys and Arrowsmiths, auctioneers, valuers, land and estate agents." He thought that Septimus had potential to rise in his field if he could keep his health.

Mrs. Peters – The married daughter of Septimus and Lucrezia's neighbor, Mrs. Filmer.

Sir Harry – A failed painter who attends Clarissa's party.

Mrs. Hilberry – An old woman who attends Clarissa's party, and moves Clarissa to tears by commenting that Clarissa looks like her mother.

Homeless woman – An old homeless woman who Richard sees while walking in the park. She laughs at him. She makes him think of "the problem of vagrancy" but he doesn't have much interest in her as an individual.

Old man – An old man who Septimus sees moments before throwing himself out of his window, to his death.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

PRIVACY, LONELINESS, AND COMMUNICATION

Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf gives us glimpses into the minds of her characters while at the same time showing their outward communication with other people. This framework leads to a complex series of relations, and her characters deal with the privacy, loneliness, and communication of these relationships in different ways. Peter Walsh is notably introverted, and gets swept up in his personal fantasies. Even Clarissa, who loves parties, deeply experiences her own incommunicable thoughts and the independence of her existence. She enjoys mingling with other people, but thinks that the true heart of life lies in the fact that the old woman across the way has her own room, and Clarissa has hers.

The inherent privacy of the soul is not always positive, though, and it often appears as loneliness. Septimus is the greatest example of this. No one understands his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and inner turmoil. Woolf shows the loneliness of the soul in nearly every interaction between characters, as she contrasts people's rich inner dialogues with their often mundane, failed attempts at communication with each other. Richard tries to say "I love you" to Clarissa, but is unable to do so and gives her **flowers** instead. Clarissa even sees Septimus's suicide as an act of communication, but by its very nature Septimus can receive no response from the world. The important reunion pointed to by the entire book – the meeting between Clarissa, Peter, and Sally – only takes place beyond the page, just after the novel ends. With all this privacy, loneliness, and failed communication Woolf shows how difficult it is to make meaningful connections in the modern world. Something as seemingly-frivolous as Clarissa's party then takes on a deeper, more important meaning, as it as an effort by Clarissa to try to draw people together.

SOCIAL CRITICISM

Though *Mrs. Dalloway*'s action concerns only one day and mostly follows a lady throwing a party, Woolf manages to thread her novel with criticism of English society and post-War conservatism. In Woolf's time the British Empire was the strongest in the world, with colonies all across the globe (including Canada, India, and Australia), but after World War I England's power began to crumble. England was technically victorious in the War, but hundreds of thousands of soldiers died and the country suffered huge financial losses. *Mrs. Dalloway* then shows how the English upper class tried to cling to old, outmoded traditions and pretend that nothing had changed. This is tragically exhibited through Septimus, as society ignores his PTSD. Septimus fought for his country, but now the country is trying to pretend that the horrors of war left no lasting traces on its soldiers.

The empty tradition and conservatism of the aristocracy is also shown in the characters of Lady Bruton, Aunt Helena, and Hugh Whitbread, who have traditional values and manners but are hopelessly removed from modern life. Richard works for the Conservative Party, which is portrayed as outdated, stuffy, and soon to be replaced by the Labor Party. All the characters are still preoccupied with social class, as when Clarissa snobbily avoids inviting her poor cousin Elsie to her party. Even the poor Doris Kilman is endlessly bitter towards Clarissa for her wealth and charm. The futility of classism and outdated conservatism then culminates in the figure of the **Prime Minister**. He is first mentioned as Peter's critique of Clarissa (that she will marry a prime minister and so become a useless appendage to a role rather than the partner to a man) and then his "greatness" is discussed by people in the street, but when the Prime Minister actually appears in person he is ordinary and almost laughable. The Prime Minister belongs to the old order of Empire, repression, and classism, which Woolf shows must be discarded so that England can survive in the modern era.

TIME

Mrs. Dalloway takes place over the course of one day, and in its very framework Woolf emphasizes the passage of time. There are no real chapter breaks, and the most notable divider of the narrative is the chiming of **Big Ben** as the day progresses. All the novel's action is so compressed (and usually composed of thoughts and memories) that a few minutes can fill many pages. The chiming of Big Ben is a reminder of the inevitable march of time, and fits with Clarissa's fear of death and the danger of living even one day.

The circular presence of the past is also deeply intertwined with the forward ticking of the clock. Clarissa, Peter, Richard, and Sally interact very little in the present, but Clarissa and Peter relive in great depth their youth at Bourton, so their past relations add weight and complexity to their present interactions. Septimus is even more ruthlessly pursued by the past, as he actually sees visions of Evans, his dead soldier friend. One of Woolf's original titles for the book was "The Hours," so she clearly finds the idea of time important, and by simultaneously emphasizing the chiming of the hours and the ubiquity of past memories, she ends up showing the fluidity of time, which can be both linear and circular at once.

PSYCHOLOGY AND PERCEPTION

The novel mostly consists of inner dialogue and stream of consciousness (a modernist technique that Woolf helped pioneer), so the inner workings of the characters' minds are very important to the work. Woolf herself suffered from mental illness (and ultimately committed suicide), and certain aspects of her own psychological struggles appear in the book, particularly through Septimus. Woolf had a distrust of doctors regarding psychology, which she shows clearly in Dr. Holms and Sir William Bradshaw. Septimus is a tragic example of just how much harm doctors can do when they prefer conversion to understanding, refusing to truly examine another's mental state.

In Septimus Woolf shows the inner workings of PTSD and mental illness, but in her other characters she also gives a brilliant, sensitive treatment of how the mind understands external sensations and time. Long, poetic passages capture the perception of images, sounds, memories, and stream of consciousness all at once. The science of psychology was still young in Woolf's time, but in her intricate, penetrating character development she shows her own knowledge of the brain, creating personalities that exhibit the inner workings of all kinds of minds.

DEATH

Though much of the novel's action consists of preparations for a seemingly frivolous party, death is a constant undercurrent to the characters' thoughts and actions. The obvious example of this is Septimus, who suffers from mental illness and ends up killing himself. In his inner dialogue Septimus sees himself as a godlike figure who has gone from "life to death," and his situation as a former soldier shows how the death and violence of World War I have corrupted his mind. Peter Walsh fears growing old and dying, and so tries to pretend he is young and invincible by living in fantasies and pursuing younger women. Clarissa is also preoccupied with death even as she goes about the business of enjoying life, making small talk, and throwing parties. From the start she feels the danger of living even one day, and repeatedly quotes from Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline*, a passage about the comfort of death: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun / Nor the furious winter's rages." In the parallel characters of Septimus and Clarissa, Woolf shows two ways of dealing with the terror of living one day – Clarissa affirms life by throwing a party, while Septimus offers his suicide as an act of defiance and communication. These two characters never meet, but when Clarissa hears about Septimus's suicide she feels that she understands him.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FLOWERS

The first line of the book is Clarissa Dalloway saying she will "buy the flowers herself," and she soon enters a flower shop and marvels at the variety. Flowers are a traditional symbol of love and femininity, but for Clarissa they also represent the joy and beauty that can be found in everyday life. Woolf also uses the symbol in a more satirical sense as well, as Elizabeth is compared to a flower by would-be suitors and Richard brings Clarissa roses instead of saying "I love you." Sally, the most rebellious female figure of the book (when she was young), cut the heads off of flowers instead of cutting their stems, and Aunt Helena found this "wicked." This shows how Sally deals differently with femininity (flowers) than is traditional to the older generation (Aunt Helena). In her very act of kissing Clarissa, one could say that Sally picks a flower.

THE PRIME MINISTER

Mrs. Dalloway began as two different short stories, and one of them was called "The Prime Minister." In the novel the Prime Minister acts as a symbol of England's traditional values and social hierarchy, which have begun to decline as a result of World War I. When Peter Walsh wanted to insult Clarissa and suggest she would give up her ideals to become a "perfect hostess," he said that she will marry a prime minister. Lady Bruton, on the other hand, uses "Prime Minister" as a compliment to Hugh Whitbread, another figure of English tradition. The car that is possibly bearing the prime minister is a spectacle in the street, but then people turn away from it to look at the airplane advertisement. At Clarissa's party the Prime Minister's arrival is greatly anticipated, but when he actually shows up he is a disappointment. Throughout the novel people cling to their ideas of "greatness" in English society, while the reality becomes more and more sobering and pathetic.

BIG BEN

Big Ben is a famous clock tower and London monument, but it also serves as an interesting symbol of time and tradition in the book. The clock tower is part of the Palace of Westminster, and so in one way it acts as a symbol of English tradition and conservatism, the attempt to pretend that the War and modern life haven't changed anything. But by its very nature Big Ben is also a clock, and so it dispassionately marks the endless progression of time, which waits for no one. The striking of the clock is the main divider in

the narrative of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and interrupts characters' thoughts and actions with "leaden circles dissolving in the air." Time is an important theme of the novel (Woolf's original title for the book was "The Hours"), as Clarissa and Septimus both feel the danger of living even one day, and all the characters experience vibrant memories of the past. The striking of Big Ben is then a continuous reminder of ever-present time, which is both linear (the progression of hours) and circular (the constant presence of the past).

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harcourt edition of *Mrs. Dalloway* published in 1990.

Section 1 Quotes

For having lived in Westminster – how many years now? over twenty, – one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air.

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Early in the novel, Big Ben strikes for the first time: it will occupy a central place in the novel even as its precise meaning and implications vary. The sound enters as a concrete measure in the midst of Clarissa's somewhat vague and disjointed thoughts. Time seems rather open and free in the beginning of this passage, even as Clarissa has the sense that she is waiting for something as she perceives the city around her. Big Ben's strikes divide this wide-open time, giving Clarissa a way to situate her perceptions within a certain order.

In a certain way, then, Big Ben's marking of time is a way for Clarissa to order her own perceptions and her own psychological reality. But it also, of course, can be heard throughout the city - indeed, its strikes record the passing of time in the most public, regulated ways possible. Big Ben will thus serve as a way to unite the various plot strands of the novel through a guiding motif. But it will also join them in a different way, as an underlying reminder of how "irrevocable" the passing of time is, as each strike "dissolves" such that the hour cannot be taken back or relived, except in memory.

How he scolded her! How they argued! She would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said.

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Clarissa is recalling her early relationship with Peter Walsh, who once asked her to marry him, but also grew frustrated with her and critiqued her with words that Clarissa recalls in this passage. Marrying a Prime Minister is, in Peter's consideration, a grave insult: he associates such leaders with the stuffy, antiquated past of the English empire, a past that can only be embarrassing to continue to prop up. "Perfect hostess" is also an accusatory insult, suggesting a lack of depth and a contentment with superficial things in life. Ironically, Clarissa is remembering these words as she rushes around London, doing all she can to be an ideal hostess for her party that evening (which the Prime Minister will attend). But her recollections also underline just how little Peter was able to express how he really felt for Clarissa without descending into frustrated insults, even if they had a real social basis.

She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary.

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout *Mrs. Dalloway,* the humdrum errands and daily realities of London life, taxi cabs and all, will contrast but also coexist with deep metaphysical questions, as well as the constant, looming reality of death. The danger of living "even one day" serves to justify the span of the novel - just one day - as containing within it themes both great and small. Within all the minutia of daily existence, the novel suggests, death is never far off - which can make daily life momentous even while suggesting that death is part of the fabric of insignificant daily realities.

At the same time, there is a suggestion that Clarissa's own deep thoughts do not necessarily stem from her extraordinary mind or profound ideas. These lines imply that thoughts of life as dangerous or death as ever-present are the proper terrain of a scholar or philosopher - but here, Clarissa's own preoccupation with these questions suggests once again that they can be and are part of ordinary life. It is the disconnect between the wide range of her thoughts and their seeming distance from what she says and how she acts that contributes to her sense of being alone and "out to sea": she treasures this privacy, but it can easily turn towards loneliness as well.

❝ But every one remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

As Clarissa moves throughout London's streets, she pays close attention to the sights and sounds around her. In many ways, Clarissa seems to treasure these details and treasure the life that she sees pulsing within them. Life, for her, is precious even or especially when it includes "the fat lady in the cab," and everything else around her. Death, then, is to be feared because it means the end of this possibility of close, acute perception - as well as the fact that everything will continue without her there to perceive it.

At the same time, however, Clarissa seems to acknowledge that there is often just as much pain as joy in the act of intense psychological perception. In this sense, death would be a relief, a refuge from the inevitable, exhausting need to observe and perceive everything around her. These two views are not reconciled: instead, they both coexist, or rather Clarissa moves from one to another and back again as thoughts of death continue to occupy her.

Section 2 Quotes

❝ "Look, look, Septimus!" she cried. For Dr. Holmes had told her to make her husband (who had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts) take an interest in things outside himself.
So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty... Tears ran down his cheeks.
It was toffee; they were advertising toffee, a nursemaid told Rezia.

Related Characters: Lucrezia Smith (Rezia), Septimus Warren Smith (speaker), Dr. Holmes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

An airplane has spelled out an advertisement for "TOFFEE" in sky writing, and Lucrezia Smith is drawing Septimus's attention to it. The first part of this passage satirically underlines the shocking (to a modern audience) disregard that many at the time - even doctors - showed towards people suffering from PTSD, a severe condition rather than a mere sign that Septimus was "out of sorts." Still, Lucrezia's cry to her husband does touch Septimus, even if in an entirely different way - one that he cannot communicate to Lucrezia.

Immediately after Septimus's sense of beauty and near-mystical communication, however, we learn what exactly the airplane is communicating: rather than a powerful, symbolic message, it is simply a profit-driven stunt, part of a modern world where material progress and wealth are ruthlessly pursued. The juxtaposition of the advertisement for toffee and Septimus's silent meditation is not just ironic, then, but also a sign of the tragic difficulty of real, profound communication that also, at least in this novel, is a part of modern life.

Section 3 Quotes

But she could remember going cold with excitement, and doing her hair in a kind of ecstasy... and going downstairs, and feeling as she crossed the hall "if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy." That was the feeling – Othello's feeling, and she felt it, she was convinced, as strongly as Shakespeare meant Othello to feel it, all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton!

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker), Sally Seton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34-35

Explanation and Analysis

Clarissa is remembering the summer she spent at Bourton when she was younger, and when she was passionately in love with Sally Seton - a feeling that is quite different from her relationship to her husband, Richard. Here she recalls descending the stairs in a white dress to meet Sally. Like elsewhere, Clarissa draws on her knowledge of Shakespeare in assigning meaning to the events of her life and to her memories. The citation from *Othello* underlines just how vividly Clarissa perceived everything around her that summer - a time during which she felt a kind of communion that she's struggled to find since then. In addition, the citation reflects how closely joy and death are connected, for her, in that death seems to lie on just the other side of acute joy.

Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally.

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway, Sally Seton

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

As she pursues her set tasks through the streets of London, where she remains largely anonymous and alone, Mrs. Dalloway returns in her thoughts to moments in her past at which she sensed true communion and connection to another. One of those moments is described, here, in the memory of her kiss with Sally. "Alone" she may have been, but in this case, paradoxically, solitude and the disappearance of others only enabled greater connection between the two women.

The novel also uses this passage to explore the strange workings of time: a moment can fill up more space than many empty hours, and can evenbe as powerful as years. The way time passes - or the way it seems to pass - can depend more on an individual's perception than on time as measured by clocks, and that one can return to past moments in memory reinforces a suggestion of perceived time as cyclical rather than linear.

Section 6 Quotes

It was awful, he cried, awful, awful!
Still, the sun was hot. Still, one got over things. Still, life had a way of adding day to day.

Related Characters: Peter Walsh (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Peter is thinking about his long-ago rejection by Clarissa: her sublime memory of her kiss with Sally at Bourton now has another layer with the addition of Peter's separate, painful perception of that time. Peter shuttles between feeling acutely the real pain of that moment, and consoling himself by keeping his senses alert to what is around him here, in the present. In a way, he believes, time does ease pain merely by the fact of adding new experiences and memories atop old ones. He has had an entire life since Clarissa rejected him, after all. But at the same time, the last few sentences of this passage seem not to be entirely honest. Coming as they do directly after his exclamation at the "awful" event, they suggest that time does not heal all wounds, that present perception and the reality of past experiences do not cancel each other out, but rather coexist and mingle with each other.

Her emotions were all on the surface. Beneath, she was very shrewd – a far better judge of character than Sally, for instance, and with it all, purely feminine; with that extraordinary gift, that woman's gift, of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be. She came into a room; she stood, as he had often seen her, in a doorway with lots of people round her. But it was Clarissa one remembered. Not that she was striking; not beautiful at all; there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was, however; there she was.

Related Characters: Peter Walsh (speaker), Clarissa Dalloway, Sally Seton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75-76

Explanation and Analysis

Peter's thoughts continue to circle back to Clarissa, casting doubt on the notion that, as he claims, he doesn't love her anymore. Here he thinks in particular about Clarissa's social presence, the way she creates a "world" around herself wherever she moves and stands. She doesn't necessarily communicate taste, beauty, or genius, and yet there is a kind of allure in her very presence, as well as a way she imprints herself on the memories of others so as to last beyond this physical presence.

The end of this passage recalls Clarissa's own assurances, earlier in the novel, that there is nothing exceptional about her. But by reiterating "there she was" - a phrase that will return at the end of the novel - Peter remarks upon the mystery of human relationships outside mere communication, in which co-presence either makes up for or takes the place of communicated truth.

She enjoyed practically everything... She had a sense of comedy that was really exquisite, but she needed people, always people, to bring it out, with the inevitable result that she frittered her time away, lunching, dining, giving these incessant parties of hers, talking nonsense, saying things she didn't mean, blunting the edge of her mind, losing her discrimination.

Related Characters: Peter Walsh (speaker), Clarissa Dalloway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Peter's thoughts continue to focus on Clarissa, and here his analysis of her extends to her social self, the way she is constructed by and through those around her. Peter's judgment seems in many ways to be quite critical of Clarissa, although we have to balance his tone with the knowledge that he was once, and may well still be, in love with her and simultaneously frustrated with himself for loving her. Peter also doesn't seem entirely clear on whether Clarissa's true self comes to the fore when she is around others, or whether she is artificial and in some way not truly herself around other people. In the same way, this passage is ambivalent regarding whether the parties given by Clarissa are actually superficial and meaningless, or are true possibilities for communication among different people: this is an ambivalence that will run throughout the book.

Section 7 Quotes

Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square.

Related Characters: Septimus Warren Smith, Miss Isabel Pole

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

In this part of the novel, we learn some of the backstory of Septimus Smith, who before the war was an idealistic young man in love with Miss Isabel Pole, a teacher and Shakespeare scholar. This passage suggests that Septimus had very little idea of why he went to war or what England was fighting for. His notion of "England" was composed of the small amount of experiences he had, and these two examples are meant to underline the limits and partial nature of these experiences. But the passage also implies that it was not Septimus's fault to have gone to war for such reasons: instead, a whole country went to war for various reasons, many of which were just as random or partial - and suffered a great deal as a result.

"So you're in a funk," he said agreeably, sitting down by his patient's side. He had actually talked of killing himself to his wife, quite a girl, a foreigner, wasn't she? Didn't that give her a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn't one owe perhaps a duty to one's wife? Wouldn't it be better to do something instead of lying in bed? For he had forty years' experience behind him; and Septimus could take Dr. Holmes's word for it – there was nothing whatever the matter with him.

Related Characters: Dr. Holmes (speaker), Septimus Warren Smith, Lucrezia Smith (Rezia)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Septimus is recalling his conversations with Dr. Holmes after Rezia sent for him, growing upset and angry at Septimus's coldness and inability to feel after the war. Here, Dr. Holmes shows himself to be the epitome of the clueless, conventional Englishman stuck in the Victorian past. He may have 40 years of experience as a doctor, but he is cheerfully unaware of the massive crisis caused by World War I, and seems entirely uninterested in taking Septimus's PTSD seriously. Perception, this passage says, is not necessarily a matter of trial and error, time and experience, such that someone who has lived longer would be better able to see things as they are. Instead, this book understands the Great War as a violent tear in history that has changed the very ways of experiencing the world, even while many people continued to refuse to understand that things had changed so drastically.

Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion, until the mound of time was so far diminished that a commercial clock, suspended above a shop in Oxford Street, announced… that it was half-past one.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

Rezia is thinking about how frustrating the consultation with Sir William has been, how annoyed she became at his unwillingness to listen and his insistence that Septimus conform to expected social categories and modes of being. Now, everything that Rezia perceives around her is filtered through this specific element of her consciousness. The "clocks of Harley street," in one sense, are the same for everyone - their chiming and striking divides the day equally in a standardized way, according to the modern social definition of time. At the same time, though, this passage reminds us that the "mound of time" can *feel* entirely differently and mean very different things for different people. It may be "half past one" for everyone on Oxford Street, but for Rezia the equal divisions of clocks are at one with the submission and authority that she feels suffocated by, as a result of the consultation with Sir William. In such a way, time is shown to be not standardized at all, instead dependent on individual perception and affected by individual consciousness.

And Richard Dalloway strolled off as usual to have a look at the General's portrait, because he meant, whenever he had a moment of leisure, to write a history of Lady Bruton's family.
And Millicent Bruton was very proud of her family. But they could wait, they could wait, she said, looking at the picture; meaning that her family, of military men, administrators, admirals, had been men of action, who had done their duty; and Richard's first duty was to his country…

Related Characters: Richard Dalloway, Lady Bruton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

As Richard is leaving the luncheon, he lingers over the portrait of Lady Bruton's ancestor. According to the way this passage understands portraits, they are firmly located in the past: they record and celebrate past events so as to fix them in memory. Although the general and other members of Lady Burton's family were once "men of action," they are so no longer - they "had done" their duty and now are no longer relevant to the action that is going on now. Lady Bruton seems perfectly complacent with this reality, but the novel as a whole is more critical of what she and her family represent - making clear that a new reality needs to replace the old one, which is now only relegated to dusty portraits in wealthy apartments.

Really it was a miracle thinking of the war, and thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten; it was a miracle. Here he was walking across London to say to Clarissa in so many words that he loved her.

Related Characters: Richard Dalloway (speaker), Clarissa Dalloway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

Richard has bought a bouquet of flowers to give to Clarissa, as he thinks - too rarely, he chides himself - of how he loves her. In this passage it occurs to him in particular that he is lucky since so many other young men, with their whole lives ahead of them, had these futures destroyed when they died in the war, and are no longer able to enjoy love and companionship like he is. Of course, it is ironic, then, that Richard's luck occurs to him randomly and rarely, rather than being a natural part of his daily life. Richard does acknowledge the tragedy of the war, but it only crosses his mind occasionally, and remains relevant to him largely as a contrast to his own good fortune.

As for Buckingham Palace (like an old prima donna facing the audience all in white) you can't deny it a certain dignity, he considered, nor despise what does, after all, stand to millions of people (a little crowd was waiting at the gate to see the King drive out) for a symbol, absurd though it is; a child with a box of bricks could have done better, he thought... but he liked being ruled by the descendant of Horsa; he liked continuity; and the sense of handing on the traditions of the past.

Related Characters: Richard Dalloway (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

Richard is fully comfortable in his position as a member of London's upper class, but he does possess enough self-awareness to be able to think about it critically and from a distance. Buckingham Palace, he thinks, is valuable mainly as a symbol - he acknowledges that it may even be silly when judged objectively. Richard shows a certain condescension in thinking that the value of Buckingham Palace is in its powerful symbolism for the crowds, the "little crowd" who lack the ability - like his own - of artistic discernment.

At the same time, though, Richard aligns with this very crowd in admitting that he too enjoys what the palace stands for. The past to Richard is not something overwhelming, painful, or even very complicated: rather than recurring in cyclical ways or moving at disjointed speeds, time to him is important for the traditions that it held, and for the ways these traditions carry forward to the present. In other words, Richard believes in straightforward continuity, in a stream of time in which there are no breaks or interruptions and in which everyone can find his or her proper place rather easily.

And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect – something, after all, priceless.

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker), Richard Dalloway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

Richard has just returned home and has given Clarissa the flowers, although he was unable to say "I love you" - and yet he believed that Clarissa somehow understood. Here, we're reminded that such romantic, unspoken communication is largely an exception: Clarissa didn't, after all, understand what her husband meant. Yet at the same time, Clarissa seems to accept the "gulf" at the heart of even the intimate relationship between husband and wife. She even wonders if there's something positive in this lack of communication, since it suggests that there is something dignified and powerful about each person's precious, unbreakable solitude.

Clarissa, after all, prizes her own independence and revels in being able to be alone in her thoughts. Nonetheless, it's never entirely clear in the novel to what extent Clarissa truly believes what she seems to think here, whether she's convincing herself that she does, or whether her real perception is entirely different than what we would expect from the prose. This inability to see into characters'

consciousness fully is typical in the book, and it underlines the interest throughout the narrative about the complexity of communication, as well as the complexity of perception itself.

❝ But to go deeper, beneath what people said (and these judgements, how superficial, how fragmentary they are!) in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

After Richard has left her, Clarissa thinks about the strange disconnect between the concrete realities and necessities of her socialite role and the monumental but amorphous "life" that she finds so mysterious. There must, she think, be something "beneath" and behind what people say to each other. Usually, this communication doesn't happen, and the important things are left unsaid.

Paradoxically, however, Clarissa seems to hope that she can get at this "beneath" by bringing different people from different kinds of lives together. The danger is that their conversation will remain superficial, and yet there seems to be no other way of fostering true communication, so that people are truly "brought together" in mutual understanding, not just "brought together" physically around the same table. Clarissa is both sincere in wanting to foster such connections, and doubtful of whether they actually take place. By the end of the passage, she's even questioning what these connections are good for - what use it is for people to shed their natural loneliness and share what they really feel. Would she and they better understand "life" if they did so, perhaps? Clarissa doesn't seem entirely convinced.

❝ All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitbread; then suddenly in came Peter; then these roses; it was enough. After that, how unbelievable death was! – that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all...

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker), Peter Walsh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

In her head, Clarissa runs over all the sensations and small happenings of the day thus far. She simultaneously marvels at the rich particularities of daily life and wonders at how easily they are all cut off. Here, we see a major difference between Clarissa and Septimus: although they are both preoccupied with death, Clarissa takes much greater joy in the small daily realities of her life. The events she mentioned are not important objectively - indeed, they're perhaps not important to anyone other than herself, as she acknowledges when she realizes that no one will be able, after her death, to witness and report how much she loved this life. But Clarissa is able to treasure them regardless.

Clarissa's thoughts here also linger on the strange nature of the passing of time. Indeed, one of the reasons she feels that her love of life will remain unremarked-upon is that she cannot manage to assign meaning to or profoundly conceptualize the way she experiences time as cut through with daily events. Clarissa usually is able to remark upon the daily happenings of her life without having to fit them into some greater meaning, but here she does think about this lack - although only in the vague sense of calling it strange and unbelievable.

> The cruelest things in the world, she thought, seeing them clumsy, hot, domineering, hypocritical, eavesdropping, jealous, infinitely cruel and unscrupulous, dressed in a mackintosh coat, on the landing; love and religion. Had she ever tried to convert any one herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves? And she watched out of the window the old lady opposite climbing upstairs. Let her climb upstairs if she wanted to; let her stop; then let her, as Clarissa had often seen her, gain her bedroom, part her curtains, and disappear again into the background. Somehow one respected that – that old woman looking out of the window, quite unconscious that she was being watched. There was something solemn in it – but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul.

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker), The old woman across the way

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

Clarissa is, first, thinking about how much she dislikes Doris Kilman and her earnest, aggressive Christianity. Then Clarissa watches an old woman in the house opposite her own climb up the stairs, and this scene, while seemingly totally separate from the previous one, ultimately fits in with Clarissa's frustration (especially given that so much of the novel's scenes are inflected by the consciousness of the person who experiences, perceives, and reflects upon them). In some ways, the old woman's solitude underlines how alone we all are in the world.

While the "privacy of the soul" has previously been cast in a negative light at times, here the aloneness of the old woman is something that Clarissa finds powerful and meaningful. Her privacy is something that, at least in the confines of her room, cannot be touched, and it gives her a certain dignity that is challenged to a greater extent in the social world. Nonetheless, Clarissa acknowledges how fragile such privacy and solitude are. "Love and religion," for Clarissa, are two things that involve other people, and so necessarily involve sacrifice and claims on one's own independence. At least in this passage, Clarissa disapproves of such claims, prizing the old woman for representing the opposite. Of course, we should remember that Clarissa *is* watching the old woman - as are we readers - which should make us question to what extent true privacy and solitude are possible at all.

> Mrs. Peters had a spiteful tongue. Mr. Peters was in Hull. Why then rage and prophesy? Why fly scourged and outcast? Why be made to tremble and sob by the clouds? Why seek truths and deliver messages when Rezia sat sticking pins into the front of her dress, and Mr. Peters was in Hull?

Related Characters: Septimus Warren Smith (speaker), Lucrezia Smith (Rezia)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

Rezia is sewing a hat for Mrs. Peters, and for the first time in weeks, Septimus begins to awaken to the mundane reality around him and to pay attention to his surroundings. Here, in a series of rhetorical questions, he chides himself for his moments of rage and grief, of desire for truth-telling and for grasping at the profound realities of life. Now, he repeats the information that Rezia gives him, about where Mr. Peters is, about what Mrs. Peters is like, and clings on to these pieces of information as anchors grounding him in daily life. Rather than consider these things as banal and unimportant, Septimus - at least momentarily - feels that they are an opportunity for real communication with Rezia, as well as being powerful reminders of the potential meaning to be found in everyday life.

> But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings – what did *they* want? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings.

Related Characters: Septimus Warren Smith (speaker), Mrs. Filmer, Dr. Holmes

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

Septimus has been told he must be sent away and institutionalized because he has threatened suicide. Here, he has decided to end his life on his own terms - even though he does not want to die. This expression seems to conflict with how Septimus has felt earlier, and yet can be understood in light of the immediately preceding moments of true, powerful reception and communication with his

wife. (Whether those moments could have lasted is a question the book raises, but does not answer.)

This powerful passage mixes narrative development with Septimus's scattered but lucid and perceptive mind. On one level, we get his thoughts on the basic human instinct for survival, but mixed with a reference to Clarissa's oft-quoted line from Shakespeare about "fear no more the heat o' the sun." (Here it is "Life was good. The sun hot.") This turns the quote's meaning on its head (the heat of the sun is a positive, simple aspect of living, instead of a negative, simple aspect of living), and its appearance in Septimus's mind also provides an almost metaphysical connection between himself and Clarissa at the moment of his death.

Septimus ends his life with an unanswerable question - what do human beings want? - as well as with an attempt at communication, throwing himself out of a window in a way that suggests a violent desire to transcend the boundaries of one's own confinement. Septimus's death is not just metaphysical, however: it also has social implications, since it is so telling that Septimus considers death better than the institutional confinement that is the only way people at the time can imagine dealing with problems like his PTSD. But the last moments of Septimus's life also pay homage to the power of perception that coexists with the depths of loneliness and fear.

Section 9 Quotes

"How delightful to see you!" said Clarissa. She said it to every one. How delightful to see you! She was at her worst – effusive, insincere. It was a great mistake to have come. He should have stayed at home and read his book, thought Peter Walsh; should have gone to a music hall; he should have stayed at home, for he knew no one.

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway, Peter Walsh (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

The narrative has moved quickly and even grotesquely from Septimus's death to the banal small talk to be found at Clarissa's upper-class dinner party. Here, the passage is filtered through Peter's mind. Peter has long criticized Clarissa's social attitudes and what he sees as superficial hypocrisy, even as he's attracted to these very abilities at the same time. Peter presumably responds just as politely to Clarissa, but since we're seeing things through his perspective, we see just how many regrets and internal anxieties run through his mind as he realizes how difficult, if not impossible, it would be to break through Clarissa' insincerity and truly communicate with her.

Nobody looked at him. They just went on talking, yet it was perfectly plain that they all knew, felt to the marrow of their bones, this majesty passing; this symbol of what they stood for, English society. Old Lady Bruton... swam up, and they withdrew into a little room which at once became spied upon, guarded, and a sort of stir and rustle rippled through every one, openly: the Prime Minister!
Lord, lord, the snobbery of the English! thought Peter Walsh, standing in the corner. How they loved dressing up in gold lace and doing homage!

Related Characters: Peter Walsh (speaker), Lady Bruton

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

The Prime Minister has arrived at Clarissa's party, and here we see the guests' reactions, filtered through the perspective of Peter, who looks on from afar quite skeptically. Although the Prime Minister has been mentioned with awe earlier in the book, here Peter sees him as a small, plump, unassuming-looking man, unworthy of all that attention - and indeed, representative of a bygone age. Peter is already feeling alone and isolated, so he is inclined to view everything he sees around him rather negatively. However, his isolation also allows him to become acutely attuned to the hypocrisy that can be seen in the way everyone acts, trying to be casual but actually over-excited by their mere proximity to this important figure.

Lady Bradshaw (poor goose – one didn't dislike her) murmured how, "just as we were starting, my husband was called up on the telephone, a very sad case. A young man (that is what Sir William is telling Mr. Dalloway) had killed himself. He had been in the army." Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought.

Related Characters: Lady Bradshaw, Clarissa Dalloway (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

Lady Bradshaw and her husband, Sir William, have just arrived late to the party, and Lady Bradshaw explains to Clarissa why this is the case. We see once more how the narrative strains involving Clarissa and Septimus intersect in brief, glancing ways. Here, however, Clarissa will be more deeply affected than in previous scenes, even if initially she seems to be simply surprised more than moved or distraught. Clarissa is fully in her social-hostess mode, and it takes her a moment to adapt to the news - and yet she is also not entirely surprised, given that death seems to intrude in the way she thinks about daily life every day. That is, once again Clarissa notices and remarks upon the strangeness of trying to live one's everyday life with the looming reality of death, and without an overarching meaning.

The way Lady Bradshaw describes Septimus's death also underlines the British upper-class cluelessness regarding the true state of veterans suffering from PTSD. "He had been in the army" is a straightforward reason that Lady Bradshaw gives for Septimus's suicide, suggesting an awareness that one led to another, and yet this causal connection is neat and pat, allowing other characters to avoid responsibility or full awareness for Septimus's complex mental situation.

> She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away... A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker), Septimus Warren Smith

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

Here, at the climax of the novel, Clarissa withdraws from the party and is able to see the connections to her double - the character through whom, though they never met, similar possibilities and limitations of perception and solitude are explored throughout the book. Here Clarissa contrasts her own frivolous, superficial life with the profound and meaningful act of communication that Septimus embraced - even if, paradoxically, this great moment of his life is what ended it. While Clarissa throws things away every day - a shilling into the Serpentine, for instance - she has never thought to fling away her life, even if she does treat it as something unimportant and expendable.

Clarissa attempts to locate a center of life, of existence, though it is only vague for her - a "thing" that can be "defaced" or "obscured," or in Septimus's case "preserved" - but which ultimately moves away and "evades" all people. And once again, Clarissa considers the paradox of solitude and communication in death. On the one hand, Septimus's death is a kind of communication, but on the other it definitively cuts one off from everyone else. He has perhaps communicated something powerful to the world, but he can now receive no answering communication in return. Still, Clarissa considers even this act of isolation as a potentially powerful one, creating a kind of "closeness" if only because it becomes mutually clear how impossible true communication is.

> But that young man had killed himself.
> Somehow it was her disaster – her disgrace.

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker), Septimus Warren Smith

Related Themes:

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

Clarissa continues to think about Septimus's death in relation to her own life, and here it becomes clear that Clarissa doesn't have any one, all-encompassing theory of life, one that would allow her to interpret Septimus's death in a certain way. While she has just thought about his suicide as an act of powerful communication and defiance, now she sees it as a tragedy - and one that she herself is responsible for.

Clarissa has begun to pick up on a number of potential similarities between herself and Septimus, from their concern with death to their fascination with loneliness and communication. Here, however, their similarities only underline their divergences, for while Septimus has struggled alone and ended his life, Clarissa has become wrapped up in the unimportant superficialities of upper-class life. Even more tragically, Clarissa's realization of the connection between herself and Septimus comes only after she has definitively lost the chance to communicate with him in life.

> ...and the words came to her, Fear no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room.

Related Characters: Clarissa Dalloway (speaker), Septimus Warren Smith, Sally Seton, Peter Walsh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

Clarissa repeats again the phrase from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline,* another common thread between herself and Septimus. After a moment of darkness and despair, she once again is able to conceive of Septimus's suicide as a powerful and even positive act of communication and independence - even if, given Clarissa's shifting and contradictory opinions, we cannot be sure that this will be her final word on the subject. Still, in this scene she does feel a kinship with Septimus, suggesting that he has managed, through his death, to create a kind of communion with another person.

Once again the clock strikes, here reminding Clarissa of her duties at the party, but also serving as a reminder of the inevitable passing of time. Septimus's death has also reminded Clarissa of the "fun" and the "beauty" that she still has the time to experience in her own life. Rather than throwing away the everyday realities that have come to characterize her own existence, then, Clarissa feels once again able to return to what she has just recently labeled superficial and unimportant, feeling a renewed interest in her daily life.

> "I will come," said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?
> It is Clarissa, he said.
> For there she was.

Related Characters: Peter Walsh (speaker), Clarissa Dalloway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

Peter and Clarissa have both changed profoundly over the course of what one might think is a random, insignificant dinner party. Clarissa has been deeply affected by Septimus's death, which has triggered a number of thoughts concerning her own life. Peter, meanwhile, through his conversation with Sally, has a renewed commitment to being honest, to communicating as best he can rather than remaining frustrated with the inevitable failure of such communication. Now, he pays close attention to what he's feeling, determined to identify his feelings for Clarissa as he truly experiences them, rather than denying them to himself. Peter is thus committed to an integrity of perception, one that would not hide or deny what is experienced but would pay renewed attention to the same. At the same time, however, the book ends with this scene, leaving the resolution off-stage: we never know what the scene of true communication between Peter, Clarissa, and Sally would look like - or even if it happens at all.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

SECTION 1

It is a June morning in London, and Clarissa Dalloway, an upper-class, fifty-two-year-old woman, is hosting a party that night. She offers to buy flowers for the party instead of sending her busy servant Lucy, and she goes out into the morning light. The sudden "plunge" into sunlight reminds Clarissa of opening the windows on her father's country estate at Bourton (when she was eighteen). She would feel the freshness of the morning but also the feeling "that something awful was about to happen."

Mrs. Dalloway *is mostly written in "free indirect discourse," a style in which the third-person narrator often slips into the voice of the character they are describing. Woolf only occasionally uses quotation marks to denote speech, and often a character's musings are mingled with their perceptions or actions in reality. This first scene captures the tone of the novel – Clarissa loves life and its small sensations, but she is also constantly aware of death, with a foreboding that her joy is fragile.*

Clarissa has recently recovered from influenza. She goes out into the street and hears **Big Ben** tolling ten o'clock, and she thinks of the "leaden circles dissolved in the air." It is a bustling Wednesday morning and Clarissa notes the setting: it is five years after the end of World War I, the King and Queen are at the palace, and the streets are full of carriages and cars.

Clarissa's influenza is rarely mentioned, but it is an important brush with death that makes her appreciate life all the more. Big Ben, the famous London clock tower, acts as a symbol of tradition and the past (it is part of the Palace of Westminster) but also of the inevitable march of time. Big Ben's tolling will be both a divider and uniter in the novel, marking out each hour but also connecting people as being part of that same passage of time, hearing its tolling all together.

Clarissa feels that she loves life and all the little moments and movements of the people in the street. This is why she is throwing a party, to "kindle and illuminate" that love in others. Clarissa runs into her old friend Hugh Whitbread. Hugh is a proper, traditional English gentleman who is in London to take his wife Evelyn to the doctor. When they part Clarissa feels self-conscious about her hat.

The book is set five years after Armistice Day, when World War I ended, but England is still recovering – hundreds of thousands of soldiers died and the country suffered severe financial losses. Clarissa's party is a seemingly frivolous event, but all the characters' pasts and their inner thoughts make the party something much more meaningful.

Clarissa thinks about how she has always liked Hugh, though her husband Richard and her old friend Peter Walsh do not. Clarissa thinks again of Bourton years earlier, when Peter was making fun of Hugh for having no heart or brain, but only "the manners and breeding of an English gentleman."

Hugh Whitbread is the epitome of the "English gentleman" – he is always well-dressed, charming, and wealthy, but he has no real substance to him, making him a symbol of traditional England. Memories of Bourton add a layer of significance to the present.

Clarissa then thinks more about Peter Walsh, who has been in India for years but is returning soon. She imagines him critiquing her present life, and remembers him bringing her to tears by saying that she would marry a **Prime Minister** and become a "perfect hostess" someday. Peter had once asked Clarissa to marry him, but she refused him. Clarissa still feels that she does not live up to Peter's standards, but she is also angered that Peter himself has failed to accomplish his dreams.

We are first presented with this relationship through Clarissa's point of view – she reassures herself that she was right to refuse Peter, but she also tries to avoid thinking of the pain she caused him with such a refusal. The Prime Minister (head of the Cabinet) first appears as this representation of conventionality and stuffiness. In many ways Clarissa has *become a "perfect hostess" now, but Peter also has failed in his youthful dreams.*

Clarissa keeps walking and thinks about death. She has always felt that "it was very, very dangerous to live even one day." She herself feels like an ordinary person, with little education but a gift for knowing people by instinct. She watches people in the street and imagines how such life will go on even after she is dead. She remembers some lines from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* about the comforts of death: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun / Nor the furious winter's rages."

Clarissa's instinctive feeling has great meaning for the novel, which lasts only the period of one day. The juxtaposition of the bustle and joy of London life with the constant danger of death continues throughout the book. Shakespeare reappears many times, particularly these lines from a funeral song about the comforts found in death.

Clarissa looks at open books in a shop window. She thinks about how she does not do "things for themselves," but only to affect other people's opinions about her. She wishes that she was more like her hero, Lady Bexborough, who is large, dark, and opened a bazaar. Clarissa thinks of herself as small and birdlike, and she is conscious that the world sees her as invisible, an extension of her politician husband – as "Mrs. Richard Dalloway" instead of "Clarissa."

As we learn more about Clarissa's past, we see how she has changed from her Radical youth and settled for a kind of worldly conventionality, despite her rich inner life. Lady Bexborough never actually appears, but Clarissa often thinks of her as an idol. Clarissa feels aimless in life, as her society has no real purpose for her after she has married and had children.

Clarissa walks past a glove shop and thinks about her daughter, Elizabeth, who cares nothing for fashion but loves her dog and has been spending a lot of time with her history teacher, Miss Kilman. Miss Kilman takes Elizabeth to communion and reads the prayer book with her, which upsets the atheistic Clarissa. Clarissa worries that Elizabeth might be falling in love with Miss Kilman, but Richard thinks it is just a phase.

Woolf herself had a passionate intellectual (and briefly physical) romance with another woman, the writer Vita Sackville-West, and the idea of repressed homosexuality is an undercurrent to Mrs. Dalloway, *as such relationships were condemned in Woolf's time. Clarissa, who has a similar love for Sally Seton, can see the potential for those feelings in Elizabeth.*

Miss Kilman always wears an uncomfortable mackintosh (a rubber raincoat), which Clarissa sees as Miss Kilman's way of constantly reminding the world of what a martyr she is for being poor and unattractive. Clarissa hates Miss Kilman for this, for her bitterness and the superiority she derives from her own poverty, but Clarissa recognizes that her hatred is irrational. She thinks of this hatred as a monster living in her soul.

Despite her kindly, joyful appearance there is also a darkness in Clarissa. Woolf characterizes this fierce hatred of Miss Kilman and protectiveness of Elizabeth as a kind of nameless monster in the woods of Clarissa's soul. We first see Miss Kilman from Clarissa's perspective, but we will later slip into her thoughts as well.

Clarissa goes into the **flower** shop and is comforted by all the beautiful flowers. She has done a favor in the past for Miss Pym, the flower shop owner, and Clarissa tries to let the flowers' beauty and Miss Pym's "liking her" wash away her hatred of Miss Kilman. Clarissa suddenly thinks she hears a pistol shot in the street, but Miss Pym says it is only a car backfiring.

Flowers are often a traditional symbol of femininity and beauty, and for Clarissa they also represent the joy she takes in life. She chooses to focus on beautiful things like flowers to banish the darker parts of her soul. The car backfiring is a sudden reminder of war, as it sounds like a pistol. Death is always close at hand, with pistol shots even among the flowers.

SECTION 2

The noise comes from a fancy car going by in the street. Passersby wonder if the car contains the Queen or the **Prime Minister** behind its curtains. Septimus Warren Smith, a young veteran of World War I, also hears the car backfire. The narrative slips into Septimus's thoughts and it is clear that he suffers from "shell shock" or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from the war. Septimus feels that he is the one responsible for the traffic jam that the passing car creates.

Septimus and Clarissa never actually meet, but they often act as doubles in the novel, or two ways of dealing with the world as Woolf sees it. With Septimus, Woolf also adds another level of social criticism, showing how poorly England has handled the war and its aftermath. The country's victory was Pyrrhic and devastating, and now it has no capacity for dealing with its traumatized soldiers.

Lucrezia Smith, Septimus's young Italian wife, is embarrassed and frightened by Septimus's recent strangeness. He has recently threatened to kill himself, and Lucrezia wants someone to help her but is also afraid of showing her "failure" to anyone. She left Italy for Septimus's sake when they were married, and she remembers their past happiness before he started acting strangely. She leads Septimus on to Regent's Park.

The walls and windows between people – divisions of privacy and communication – affect all of Woolf's characters, as we see their inner dialogue and then their (usually ineffective) outer speech and actions. Lucrezia is a foreigner in England, but she too can see how there is no space for mental illness in the conservative, repressive English worldview of the time.

Other people on the street reflect on the "royal" car and feel patriotic, as they feel they have been "within speaking distance of the majesty of England." Clarissa thinks that it is probably the Queen in the car, and she conflates the Queen with her bazaar-opening idol, Lady Bexborough. Clarissa associates this regal car with Hugh Whitbread and his like, and she feels slightly guilty that she is fulfilling Peter's old insult – throwing a party and waiting at the top of the stairs.

Woolf often emphasizes the hollowness and ineffectiveness of "royalty" and contrasts it with the comfort people gain from ritual, hierarchy, and the façade of order. Everyone stops to stare at the car, though the important person never actually appears or has any real effect on any of the onlookers' lives. Clarissa is already aware of how she will disappoint Peter.

The tiny vibration of the car's passing makes more people on the street think of "the dead; of the flag; of Empire." A crowd has gathered at the gates of the nearby Buckingham Palace, and the narrative flits among the thoughts of people in the crowd. The car prepares to enter the palace's gates, but suddenly everyone is distracted from watching it when they hear an airplane flying "ominously" overhead.

Woolf shows how her society is constructed of a series of lofty ideas – the royal hierarchy, tradition, and the extensive British Empire – but these ideas are hollow at their center and contain no real meaning for people's daily lives. It is significant that the onlookers choose to look at the plane – representing the modern, industrial age, but also a reminder of the horrors of war – over the royal-looking car.

The airplane starts to spell out an advertisement in sky writing, and everyone looks up in amazement. **Big Ben** tolls that it is eleven o' clock, and everyone is too busy looking at the plane's advertisement (which seems to be for "TOFFEE") to notice the royal car passing through the palace gates.

The scene zooms out here to encompass several motifs at once – the disappearing royal car (symbol of tradition and hierarchy), the skywriting plane (representing the future of technology, capitalism, and war), and Big Ben tolling as a reminder of the unstoppable march of time.

Lucrezia, who is sitting beside Septimus in the park, tries to distract her husband with the sight of the airplane. His doctor, Dr. Holmes, apparently said that Septimus "had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts." Meanwhile Septimus starts to weep at the "exquisite beauty" in the sky. He is overcome by every minute sensation, including a woman's voice as she reads out the advertisement's letters, and he feels that the sky writing is a coded signal just for him.

Woolf had a great distrust of doctors concerning psychology, as she herself suffered from mental illness and dealt firsthand with doctors who could not understand her. Holmes is like the royal car, a reassurance that everything is okay, there is nothing really the matter, and order has prevailed – when in reality nothing is okay. Septimus also experiences the kind of joy in life that Clarissa does, though enhanced by his mental illness.

Septimus's thoughts grow wilder, and he thinks about being connected with trees. Lucrezia is distraught at seeing her husband staring and talking to himself, so she walks to a fountain and leaves him on the bench. She clings to Dr. Holmes' words and starts to get angry at Septimus for being "selfish," as there is "nothing the matter with him." She feels that for him to threaten suicide is cowardly, as the real Septimus is a brave man who fought in the war.

Septimus's character is the book's most tragic example of the loneliness of the soul. We see the world from his perspective, and then see how drastically different this is from how the world perceives Septimus. Rezia is a sympathetic character, but there is now a huge divide between her husband and herself.

Lucrezia feels all alone, as she knows no one else in England. Meanwhile Septimus is taking note of the revelations he is having, including "Men must not cut down trees" and "There is a God." Septimus suddenly feels that Evans, his dead friend from the war, is hiding behind the park railings.

The structure of the novel recalls the infinite branching of trees and their roots, as characters' thoughts and actions overlap and brush against each other, while there is another world hidden in the privacy underground. Rezia and Septimus are physically close, but inside both are totally alone and cut off from each other.

Lucrezia interrupts Septimus's visions and tries to distract him by pointing out a group of boys playing cricket. Septimus feels that he is "the greatest of mankind… lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society." A young woman, Maisie Johnson, asks the couple for directions, and as she walks away she thinks of how odd the couple (and all of London is). She now wishes she had stayed at home in Edinburgh.

Septimus is haunted by Evans and death in a similar (but more sinister) way to how Clarissa is haunted by Bourton and death. Megalomaniacal hallucinations like those Septimus has can occur in schizophrenia and extreme cases of PTSD. The science of psychology was very young in Woolf's time, and her portrayal of PTSD was especially innovative.

Meanwhile Mrs. Dempster, an older woman, watches Maisie and thinks about her own youth. She thinks about the airplane and wishes she had explored more foreign places when she was young. As the airplane keeps progressing on, still writing about "TOFFEE," a man stops by the gates of a nearby cathedral and decides to go in.

Woolf briefly flits in and out of passing people's minds, zooming out to create a larger scene. These passages show the gulf between each person's thoughts, but they also build up a web of individual souls that are all connected in some way. Woolf's vision of the world is one of simultaneous separation and connection.

SECTION 3

Clarissa returns home, and as she enters her house she feels like a nun who is returning to the familiar devotions of the convent. Clarissa does not believe in God, but she still feels thankful for precious moments (which are like "buds on the tree of life") and feels the need to somehow repay them.

Clarissa is comforted by her "nunlike" lifestyle, but it is a similar comfort to the invisibility she now has as Richard's wife – she has become subsumed into society's expectations for a middle-aged housewife.

Clarissa learns that Richard has been invited to lunch at Lady Bruton's house without her, and she is offended by this. Lucy, the servant, takes Clarissa's parasol as if it were the weapon of a goddess. Clarissa thinks of "time itself" as it appears in Lady Bruton's old age, and she immediately starts thinking of death again, quoting *Cymbeline* once more. She goes upstairs to her attic bedroom, still musing on mortality and her snubbing by Lady Bruton.

Our brief glimpse at Lucy's mind shows that she idolizes Clarissa and finds even her morning stroll with a parasol important, a contrast to Clarissa's view of herself. Lady Bruton is representative of a more patriotic, traditional era, and so it is significant that she is one of the older characters and that Clarissa thinks of "time itself" written on her face.

Clarissa takes off her hat and feels a sudden "emptiness about the heart of life." She and Richard have slept in separate rooms since Clarissa's illness, but she is happy to be alone. She thinks vaguely of how she still has a kind of "virginity" and "cold spirit" about her, as she does not feel passion for Richard.

This might be Woolf writing vaguely that Clarissa has never had an orgasm, or it might just be a way of saying that she has never experienced real passion for a man. Clarissa is comforted by the privacy of the soul, by having a "room of one's own," but she also misses romantic passion.

Clarissa does sometimes feel attracted to women more than to men, and then she can experience more passion. She remembers her old friend Sally Seton, who spent a summer at Bourton, and Clarissa feels that she was truly in love with Sally.

There was no real option of "coming out" in Woolf's time, so what the world perceives as Clarissa's "coldness" might actually just be that she is more naturally attracted to women and must try to repress these feelings.

Clarissa describes Sally in detail – in their younger days Sally was dark-haired, wild, and poor. She smoked cigarettes, read socialist writers, and once ran naked through the country house when she was bathing and forgot her sponge. Sally gave Clarissa radical things to read and together they planned to change the world. Clarissa's old Aunt Helena found Sally shocking and improper, even her habit of cutting the heads off of **flowers** and floating them in water.

Bourton keeps reappearing to enrich and complicate Clarissa's present, haunting her just like Evans haunts Septimus. We now see how radical and passionate Clarissa was when she was young, highlighting just how conventional she has become with Richard. Aunt Helena is another representative of an older, more conservative time, and she finds Sally shocking – especially Sally's treatment of flowers, a traditional feminine symbol. Sally deals with the flowers (femininity) in a different way than the norm. Sally snipping off the heads of flowers can also be seen as symbolizing her allure to other women, Clarissa in particular.

Clarissa remembers the "purity, the integrity" of her love for Sally, and she remembers being overcome at entering a house, thinking that Sally "is beneath this roof!" Clarissa also remembers going downstairs in a white dress to meet Sally and thinking of a line from Shakespeare's *Othello* – "if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy." There were other people there that day too, Peter Walsh and her own father, but Clarissa had eyes only for Sally.

Shakespeare appears often as a representation of English greatness (the kind of great art used to inspire patriotism) but also as a source of piercing, passionate quotes about death. This quote points to Septimus's future suicide, but also shows the intensity of Clarissa's passion for Sally. Once again Clarissa associates great joy as being very close to death, a kind of fragile, dramatic thing.

One night Clarissa, Sally, Peter, and another friend were out walking. Clarissa and Sally fell behind, and "Sally stopped; picked a **flower**; kissed her on the lips." Clarissa feels that this was the "most exquisite moment of her whole life," and was like a religious experience. Immediately afterward her rapture was interrupted by Peter Walsh asking if she was "stargazing," and she felt his jealousy and criticism.

Even as Big Ben keeps tolling the forward movement of time, past moments like this continue circling back within characters' minds. Clarissa shares a brief moment of true communication and intimacy with Sally, but this experience is interrupted by Peter. Even so, she has never again felt such true communion with anyone else, so Clarissa considers this kiss the highlight of her life.

Clarissa now thinks more of Peter, and how she owes much of her intellectual life to conversations with him. She and Peter have often quarreled, as she always wants his good opinion and he has high, stubborn standards. Clarissa wonders what Peter will think of her when he returns from India.

Clarissa has had a different kind of intimacy with Peter, and she is closer intellectually to him than she was to Sally. Clarissa's memories are almost all of Peter and Sally, and rarely, if ever, of Richard.

Clarissa looks at herself in the mirror. She thinks of herself as a person who brings people together, which is why she throws parties. She finds the green dress she will wear that night and starts to mend a tear in it. She is always sensitive to her servants' workloads, and so sometimes she does tasks like this herself.

Clarissa uses Peter's criticisms as a vehicle for trying to reconcile her internal self with her external self. She has a rich, intelligent inner life, but on the surface seems like a shallow society housewife. By justifying herself to Peter she is able to give greater meaning to her actions.

Lucy comes in, thinking how wonderful Mrs. Dalloway is, and she offers to help Clarissa with the dress. Clarissa refuses but thanks her. She is thankful that her servants like her and allow her to be generous. Clarissa sits quietly sewing the dress, thinking of life as a series of never-ending waves.

Clarissa takes comfort in mending the dress just as she did among the flowers. The rip in her dress is another "opening" in a series of windows and doors in the novel, objects of both communication and division.

The front doorbell rings, breaking Clarissa's reverie. She is surprised to hear that it is Peter Walsh, who has just returned from India. They greet each other and Peter kisses Clarissa's hands, but then he is immediately embarrassed. He takes out his pocketknife and plays with the blade as he always used to do.

Peter is critical and wary of any kind of sentimentality, and so he is immediately ashamed when he gives into passionate feelings during his reunion with Clarissa. This fear of sincere emotion makes Peter another character unable to truly communicate.

The two make small talk and Peter feels irritated with Clarissa for her society lifestyle and for choosing to marry the Conservative Richard. He notes that she is mending a dress, which seems very indicative of her new role as a "perfect hostess." Clarissa talks about Bourton, trying to reminisce with Peter, but Peter doesn't want to revisit the painful past "when she had tortured him so infernally."

Peter immediately reacts as Clarissa had expected him to, noting that she has fulfilled his insult of "perfect hostess" and has conformed to conventionality with Richard (even though her reasons for mending the dress are not the conservative ones Peter believes them to be). Peter felt the same passion for Clarissa that Clarissa felt for Sally, but as a man he had the social freedom to express this passion.

Peter feels a judgment in Clarissa's wealth and happiness, as if he has been a failure, and he reassures himself that he is not old yet. Meanwhile Clarissa feels that Peter's habit of playing with his knife makes anything she says seem frivolous and silly. She asks Peter about his life, and he gathers his strength and tells her that he is in love with a woman in India named Daisy.

Though Peter and Clarissa exchange few words, and it is mostly small talk, we also see how their past relations and inner dialogues give weight to the meeting. Clarissa is mending a dress (holding scissors), while Peter plays with his knife, and so the two are armed as if for a battle, critical of each other's failures and conscious of their own.

Clarissa is disappointed that Peter has succumbed to falling in love again, but she asks Peter about it. He says Daisy is a younger woman who is married to a Major in the Indian Army. She has two young children, but she wants to leave her husband for Peter. Peter has supposedly returned to England to ask his lawyers about getting a divorce for her. Clarissa pities him, as he has often wasted his life pursuing women.

Clarissa has lived a mostly passionless life (except for her feelings for Sally), while Peter has thrown his passion at many women. India was a colony of England at this time, and so Daisy and her Major husband are English emigrants.

Peter is suddenly overcome by his memories and his perceived struggle against Clarissa, and he bursts into tears. Clarissa takes his hand and kisses him, and she briefly wonders if she should have married Peter instead of Richard. Peter masters himself and goes to the window. He wonders how Clarissa can still make him think of Bourton, and he asks her if she is happy with Richard. Before she can answer, Elizabeth enters the room and **Big Ben** strikes eleven-thirty. Peter leaves abruptly, and as he goes out Clarissa reminds him of her party that night.

Peter is critical of other people's sentimentality, but he himself is victim to strong waves of emotion. Peter and Clarissa almost have a moment of intimate communication but they are interrupted by Elizabeth, just as Clarissa and Sally were interrupted by Peter. Clarissa then reminds Peter of her party, using the party as an attempt to replace or amend this ruptured moment.

SECTION 4

The narrative now follows Peter Walsh as he leaves Clarissa's house. He criticizes Clarissa angrily to himself, thinking that she has grown sentimental and insincere. Her coldness as a youth has turned into conventionality in middle age. Peter then feels ashamed that he wept and confessed to Clarissa, and he suddenly feels again the blow of Clarissa rejecting him thirty years before.

Woolf shows how immature Peter still is even as he has grown older. He is a kind of double to Rezia (as Clarissa is to Septimus), lamenting that he is alone in his suffering and distant from the person he loves. His sufferings in love seem paltry compared to Rezia's plight, though.

The St. Margaret's bell rings (a few minutes after **Big Ben**) and it makes Peter think of Clarissa's illness and the fact that she will die someday. He reassures himself that she is not dead and that he is not old yet. He knows he will soon have to ask Richard for help in finding work, but he reassures himself that he does not care what people like the Dalloways and Whitbreads think of him.

Peter often chooses to indulge in fantasy instead of accepting the reality of time – which means old age and death – and the fact that he hasn't accomplished anything substantial in life. Despite his reassurances to himself, Peter still clearly seeks Clarissa's approval even thirty years after her refusal of him.

Peter recognizes that he has been a failure in some sense, as he was expelled from Oxford, but he still feels justified in being an idealistic young man. A group of military boys marches by carrying guns, and Peter feels respect for them, though he does not respect the traditional England they defend.

Peter recognizes that he doesn't live up to his own critical expectations, and so he chooses to distract himself with fantasies, in this case the youth and idealism of the military boys, and the fantasy of a righteous, hopeful England.

Peter stands in Trafalgar Square and feels a sudden sense of freedom, as if he was young again. He sees an attractive young woman walking past and he starts to follow her at a distance. He never approaches her, but imagines her as his ideal woman as he watches her – not worldly or rich like Clarissa. He imagines how he would first greet the young woman, and Peter feels like a "romantic buccaneer," delighting in his own recklessness.

Peter seeks comfort in his relationships with women, but because he is very sensitive and needy these usually don't work out. Instead of taking part in real communication, Peter chooses this imaginary "courtship" with an idealized woman. He creates meaning for himself through an imaginary interaction.

The woman finally reaches her house, takes out her keys, and goes inside. Peter's fantasy disappears, but he isn't upset. He recognizes that "one makes up the better part of life," and he thinks of Clarissa's parting plea that he remember her party. Peter keeps walking, feeling optimistic because it is "still very early," and he heads for Regent's Park.

Peter is not delusional – he recognizes that his fantasies are fantasies, and doesn't try to cling to them. His optimism about the day is similar to his forced optimism about his life, as he tells himself that he is not getting old yet, and at least he isn't conventional like Clarissa.

Peter comes to Regent's Park and observes the London life passing by. He is proud of its civilization, which he finds ironic because he dislikes the idea of the English empire and army. He starts reminiscing, and realizes that it is his meeting with Clarissa that is making him nostalgic. He remembers how he could never get along with Clarissa's father.

Peter criticizes Clarissa and Hugh for their shallowness and conformity, but Peter has the same pride in the comforts and extravagances of English culture – excesses that come at the expense of places like India, where Peter just came from.

Peter sits down on a bench next to a gray-haired nurse with a baby in a stroller. Peter remembers Elizabeth, and suspects that she and Clarissa don't get along, as Clarissa tends to trust her own charm too much and overdo things. Peter smokes a cigar and then falls asleep.

Just as Clarissa never reminisces about Richard, so Peter seems to thinks much more about Clarissa than about Daisy. The present action for these characters is small and mundane, while their pasts and memories loom larger in comparison.

SECTION 5

Peter dreams about a solitary traveler who imagines visions of women. The traveler, who seems to be an extension of Peter himself, imagines a woman made of sky and branches offering him compassion and absolution, and then an elderly mother-figure waiting for his return. This woman becomes a kind of landlady, and she asks the traveler if she can get him anything else, but the traveler doesn't know to whom he should reply.

Peter's dream is told in impressionistic, vague language, but it emphasizes his desire to be saved by women. He creates stereotypical female figures – the lover and the mother – and has both of them focus on him. The final question of the dream is a painful reminder of Peter's loneliness, though. No real woman exists who can save him as he wants to be saved.

Peter wakes up suddenly saying "The death of the soul" to himself. He immediately links these words with a memory from Bourton in the early 1890s. That was the summer when he was in love with Clarissa, and she and some others were gathered around a table talking. Someone brought up a man who had married his housemaid, and Sally Seton said that the housemaid had had a baby before the wedding.

As usual, Peter's first thoughts are of Clarissa and Bourton. In the memory he is criticizing Clarissa and the "death of her soul," but the fact that it is always she who springs first into his head is significant. Sally was breaking social taboos by bluntly talking about this scandalous situation.

Clarissa was shocked to hear this, which was not so strange at the time, but Peter associated her prudish reaction with "the death of her soul." It seemed to show her as hard, unimaginative, and arrogant. Clarissa had then gone off alone, knowing that everyone at the table thought her unsympathetic and silly. That evening Peter had been depressed and gloomy, but he was still hopelessly in love with Clarissa.

Peter's relationship with Clarissa has such a profound effect on him because he is so critical of her even as he passionately loves her. They are almost like rivals more than friends or lovers. Clarissa is indeed often an unsympathetic character, and does have some snobbish prudishness at heart.

That same night Richard Dalloway had come to Bourton for the first time. Peter saw him sitting with Clarissa's Aunt Helena, and he knew instinctively that Clarissa would marry Richard someday. He was hurt by this revelation, but felt that it was inevitable, so it was then that he insulted Clarissa by calling her "the perfect hostess."

Richard Dalloway was Clarissa's safe, conventional choice of husband, and so it is fitting that he first appeared sitting next to Aunt Helena, the symbol of conventionality. Peter's desire to criticize Clarissa is intimately connected to his love for her.

After this burst of anger Peter felt love and passion for Clarissa again whenever she showed him kindness, but he knew that Richard Dalloway was also falling in love with her over the course of that summer. Peter and Clarissa seemed to have a perfect intellectual companionship, but he still knew that she would end up marrying Richard.

Peter would have provided Clarissa a life of more passion and interest, but his emotional neediness was already apparent. Clarissa preferred Peter as a friend (they shared true communication through their intellectual conversations), while Peter wanted Clarissa to "save him" as a lover.

In his passion Peter had often written to Sally Seton about Clarissa, and finally he confronted Clarissa by a fountain one afternoon. He considers this scene the most important and terrible moment of his life – he demanded the truth about Clarissa's feelings, and she told him that it was no use, she would not marry him. Then she turned and walked away, and Peter left Bourton that night.

Woolf presents this scene as a parallel to Clarissa's memory of Bourton – her kiss with Sally – as the greatest moment of Clarissa's life and the worst moment of Peter's. The romance and passion of their younger selves stands in contrast with the conformity and banality of the characters' middle-aged selves.

SECTION 6

Peter feels awful all over again at this memory, but he is comforted by the progression of time and how people can "get over things." Peter watches a little girl named Elise Mitchell run into a lady's legs, and he laughs out loud.

Time is frightening to Peter as a reminder of old age and death, but it comforts him in his emotional pain. Although he clearly hasn't "gotten over" Clarissa yet.

The lady is Lucrezia Smith, who is thinking that she cannot deal with Septimus's behavior anymore, as he is no longer himself. Lucrezia helps Elise Mitchell up and dusts her off, and then she is overcome by self-pity, wondering why she of all people should have been chosen to suffer like this. She is about to take Septimus to see a famous doctor, Sir William Bradshaw.

Woolf creates more threads between her characters and draws a distinct connection between Peter and Rezia. Rezia is filled with a self-pity similar to Peter's, but hers seems far more justified. She is a unique character in that she is not only lonely in her soul (like everyone else), but also lonely as a foreigner in England.

Lucrezia wonders angrily why Septimus has been acting so strangely and seeing his dead friend Evans, as lots of other men fought and lost friends in the war but didn't go insane. She remembers one day she and Septimus stood by a river and Septimus suddenly suggested that they kill themselves. On their way home he said that he understood everyone, and knew the meaning of the world, and when they got home he said he saw flames and faces and made Lucrezia write down his revelations.

There is another possible undercurrent of repressed homosexual romantic feelings between Septimus and Evans, though these are not fleshed out like Clarissa's relationship with Sally. Lucrezia is concerned about Septimus but also hyperaware of the judgmental eyes of others, who are ready to criticize anything out of the ordinary.

Lucrezia walks back to Septimus and takes his hand. He notices that she isn't wearing her wedding ring (it doesn't fit anymore because she has gotten so thin), and he feels that their marriage is over. The voices he hears tell him that he must reveal his secrets to the **Prime Minister**. Then he sees a dog that seems to turn into a man, and Septimus feels that he is splayed out alone on a rock, with the sun growing hotter.

The disconnect between Septimus's inner life and outer reality is the greatest of any character, as he shifts between moments of ecstasy and horror, while from the outside just seems to be muttering to himself. The "hot sun" is probably a reference to the quote from Cymbeline – one of the discomforts shed in death.

Septimus grows ecstatic over the beauty everywhere, and then Lucrezia tells him it is time to go see the doctor. When she says "time," Septimus sees Evans come out from behind a tree. Lucrezia says that she is very unhappy, and the clock strikes eleven forty-five. The man Septimus thought was Evans is actually Peter Walsh, who watches the couple and wonders what their trouble is.

Septimus experiences (to a heightened extent) Clarissa's joy and wonder over the beauty in daily life. Woolf's portrayal of Septimus's mental illness was innovative, as she makes us sympathetic to Septimus's point of view while simultaneously painting an accurate psychological portrait of a victim of PTSD.

To Peter, Septimus and Lucrezia's quarrel is just a part of the bustle and beauty of London. Peter wonders that so much has changed in the five years of his absence. Women wear more makeup and the newspapers can write about touchier subjects. Peter thinks of Sally Seton, and remembers that she ended up marrying a rich man and moving to Manchester.

Peter sees that the Smiths are having trouble, but he chooses to muse about it mentally instead of actually offering to help or communicate with them. We find out that even the radical Sally has become a "perfect hostess" now and conformed to the expectations for her gender.

Peter remembers Sally in her wild younger days and how she hated Hugh Whitbread. Clarissa and her other friends all admired Hugh for his charm and respectability, but Sally once told him that he "represented all that was most detestable in British middle-class life" because of his views on women's rights. Sally had a special grudge against Hugh, and claimed he once tried to kiss her in the smoking room. No one would believe this of the admirable Hugh, but she stuck to her story.

Peter shares Sally's view of people like Hugh, which seems closer to Woolf's own opinions. Normally the "admirable," respectable Hugh would never try to kiss someone like Sally, but we see that even Hugh has something underneath his artificiality – though we never find out whether it is oppressive womanizing or dissatisfaction with his own conventional self.

Later in life Hugh had married Evelyn, and now he had great wealth and a collection of tasteful objects. Peter still hates Hugh, but envies his money and success. Peter finds Richard Dalloway a "thorough good sort," but a bit dull, the kind of man who should live in the country with dogs instead of being in politics.

Richard is boring and traditional, but even Peter admits that he is a good man with kindness in his heart, unlike Hugh, who brushes only the surfaces of things. Peter recognizes that he has failed to have the monetary success of Richard and Hugh, so he lashes out at them in his thoughts.

Peter does object to Richard's views on poetry though, and he wonders how Clarissa can stand them. Richard says that decent people should not read Shakespeare's sonnets because "it was like listening at keyholes." Peter had bonded with Sally in the old days over this. Together they would complain about Hugh and Richard, and worry that those two would stifle Clarissa's soul.

We already know how important Shakespeare's work is to Clarissa, so it seems especially poignant that she submits to Richard's conservative opinions about the writer. Richard's views seem obtuse. It's worth noting that those views come from an opinion similar to Clarissa's own – that the privacy of the soul is holy – though art and poetry seem like they should be the bridges between such solitary states, and that Richard is denying art that function.

Peter thinks of Clarissa as having a special gift of being, that wherever she is "there she was." He must immediately remind himself that he isn't in love with her anymore. He reflects on her love of rank and tradition, and he feels it is a tragedy that she married Richard, as she is twice as smart as he is but now must parrot his conservative, traditional views.

Peter will often remind himself that he doesn't love Clarissa anymore, and the frequency of these occasions undercuts the validity of his words. "There she was" will be the last words of the novel, a vague description of the kind of real life and existence that can only truly occur beyond the page.

Peter thinks that Clarissa has a special genius for bringing people together, especially intellectuals and artists. He knows that she is a skeptical person at heart, and wonders if she gained insight from Huxley and Tyndall, the philosophers she used to read as a girl. He imagines her thinking that all life is inevitably doomed, so we may as well enjoy ourselves while we can. This phase of thought came after Clarissa saw a tree fall on her sister Sylvia and kill her.

This is all we hear of Sylvia, but the nature of her accidental death sheds light on Clarissa's own sentiments: that joy is never far from death, and that hopefulness comes with the foreboding of something awful. Even Peter admits that Clarissa's parties might serve some greater purpose, in bringing people together and furthering real communication.

Clarissa was at first angry at God for this tragedy, but later she became an atheist and so had no one to blame. She did not become bitter after her sister's death, but continued to enjoy life and nearly everything in it. Peter praises her cleverness to himself, but laments that she is always throwing parties and "blunting the edge of her mind."

Clarissa did not grow depressed (or get PTSD like Septimus) after witnessing her sister's death, but she was still clearly affected by it, as death lingers always just beneath the surface of her thoughts. Peter associates Clarissa's parties with her marriage to Richard.

Peter realizes that he will never suffer for love again in the way that Clarissa made him suffer, and he wonders if he is really in love with Daisy, as she doesn't torture him and he hasn't thought of her for days. The difference is perhaps that Daisy loves him back, or else that Peter's love is mostly jealousy – he can't stand to see Daisy married to anyone else. Peter is again ashamed that he wept in front of Clarissa, but he reassures himself that Clarissa is cold and passionless.

Peter is intelligent enough to see his own flaws, but he still succumbs to them. He recognizes that he has a weakness for women and is very jealous and emotionally needy, but seeing these flaws drives him to anger at Clarissa – instead of criticizing his own self-indulgent melodrama and possessive passion, he can criticize Clarissa for being "cold."

Peter's thoughts are interrupted by singing coming from opposite the Regent's Park Tube Station. The voice is like "an ancient spring spouting from the earth," and it is coming from a decrepit old woman singing as she begsg for change. She seems ageless and sexless, and the song she sings consists of meaningless syllables, love, and death, including the line "and if some one should see, what matter they?" Peter pities her and gives her a coin.

The old woman is another link between Peter and Rezia, as they both notice her but have different reactions. The woman is described as something almost primeval, and the subject of her song is deep and ageless, but for Peter she is just an interruption to his inner dialogue. Once again he avoids having a moment of true communication, pitying the woman instead of engaging with her.

SECTION 7

The narrative switches to Lucrezia (Rezia), who sees the same old woman singing. At first she pities the woman just as Peter did, but when she hears "if some one should see, what matter they?" she suddenly feels like everything will be all right, and that her own unhappiness is just a "silly dream." She is hopeful that Sir William Bradshaw will cure Septimus.

Rezia is an outsider to the patriarchal English society, so she must take her comforts where she can and she engages with the woman's song. Rezia has been painfully aware of others' eyes since Septimus got sick, and the old woman's confident words comfort her. The words also resonate with Clarissa's (future) ideas on the privacy of the soul, and the old woman in the window.

Meanwhile Septimus feels that he carries the "greatest message in the world" and is also both the happiest and most miserable of men. The narrative steps back to describe Septimus's appearance and backstory. Before the war Septimus was an aspiring poet, and he fell in love with Miss Isabel Pole. She was a woman who gave lectures about Shakespeare, and she would edit Septimus's love poems to her while carefully ignoring their subject matter.

This is the most conventional section of the novel stylistically, where Woolf reveals Septimus's backstory with no free indirect discourse or stream of consciousness. We see another parallel between Septimus and Clarissa in the importance of Shakespeare and poetry to their lives.

Mr. Brewer, who was Septimus's boss at the time and the managing clerk of "Sibleys and Arrowsmiths, auctioneers, valuers, land and estate agents," thought that Septimus had potential to rise in his field if he could keep his health. Mr. Brewer recommended that Septimus play football to grow stronger and healthier. Then World War I had begun, and Septimus enlisted. He went to France, hoping to save an England composed "almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole."

Septimus's youthful idealism and hope was a reflection of pre-War Europe, which had never experienced such a concentration of enormous numbers of casualties before World War I. Mr. Brewer is another kind of "English gentleman" like Hugh Whitbread, and both are irrelevant to the modern age.

Septimus distinguished himself in battle, and then became very close with his officer, Evans. The two were almost inseparable, but when Evans was killed (just before Armistice Day) Septimus could feel nothing. He was frightened by this, and began to think that there was a fatal flaw in his soul.

We learn very little about Septimus's war experience or his relationship with Evans, but the former was clearly traumatizing and the latter clearly emotionally important.

Septimus was billeted in Milan when he met Rezia, who made hats with her sisters. Rezia fell in love with Septimus and he thought her pretty, clever, and interesting, but he still could feel nothing. He married her to try and make up for his lack of emotion. He then returned to England with her and was decorated for his bravery at war.

The feeling of numbness is a common symptom of PTSD, but no one understood this ailment at the time and could explain it to Septimus. His war decorations then seem supremely hollow considering how the war ruined his life.

Septimus returned to reading Shakespeare, but now he felt that "Shakespeare loathed humanity," and that this loathing was in all of his writings. He found this same hatred in other great writers as well. All the while Rezia made hats and was happy with Septimus, as she liked his seriousness. Soon Rezia wanted to have children, but Septimus found sexual intercourse to be abominable. He did not want to bring children into the cruel world or pass along his own suffering.

There is a tragic disconnect between Septimus's inner life and Rezia's, and we see the great gulf that Clarissa will describe as existing even between husband and wife. As his mental illness increases, Septimus comes to think of human nature as a repulsive, evil thing.

Septimus would watch Rezia make hats and think about how humans had no real compassion for each other. He had talked to Mr. Brewer, who complained that the war ruined his geraniums and frightened his cook. Septimus would think of all the suffering in the world and worry that he would go mad.

We now see just how harmful a "gentleman" like Mr. Brewer can be. He takes no interest in the poor, the countries oppressed by the British Empire, or the soldiers suffering to preserve his comfortable lifestyle.

One day Rezia cried for the first time in their marriage, and she said she wanted children and was unhappy. Septimus still couldn't feel anything, and after this his illness grew more severe, and he would not leave his bed. Rezia sent for the local Dr. Holmes to treat him. Dr. Holmes said that nothing was wrong with Septimus – he was just "in a funk" and needed to get out more or pick up a hobby.

Dr. Holmes is the epitome of the useless, harmful doctor, a man like Hugh or Brewster who is totally incapable of dealing with anything outside the sphere of English convention. Holmes has absolutely no understanding of depression or trauma, and gives no credit to it.

Septimus did not improve, and he sometimes threatened suicide. Dr. Holmes kept visiting him, but was always convinced that Septimus had nothing the matter with him. Septimus came to associate Holmes with the "repulsive brute" of human nature, and he longed to escape him, but felt that he had been condemned to death for being unable to feel.

Holmes actually contributes to Septimus's mental illness, reinforcing his ideas about the repulsiveness and idiocy of human nature. Instead of being treated for his emotional numbness, Septimus is allowed to continue thinking of it as an unpardonable crime.

Septimus felt that the whole world wanted him to kill himself, but he didn't want to kill himself yet. It was then that he started hearing and seeing Evans. Rezia was frightened that Septimus was talking to himself, and she sent for Dr. Holmes, but Septimus cursed at him. Dr. Holmes suggested that if the Smiths no longer had confidence in him, then they should visit a specialist named Sir William Bradshaw.

The lack of communication between Septimus and Dr. Holmes is both infuriating and tragic. The worst part of Septimus's situation is that he cannot communicate his inner turmoil to anyone, even Rezia. We see more foreshadowings of suicide, but there is further tragedy in the fact that Septimus doesn't actually want to die.

Back in the present **Big Ben** tolls twelve o'clock, Clarissa lays her green dress on her bed, and Septimus and Rezia arrive for their appointment at Sir William Bradshaw's residence. Sir William is a psychiatrist who is famous for his tact and understanding. He has an expensive gray car and attends parties with the rich and famous in between treating his wealthy, troubled patients. He is an older man and has been knighted for his services to the people of England.

Woolf gives a swift link between Clarissa and Septimus by juxtaposing their actions at noon. Clarissa finishes mending her green dress and is now ready to face society, while Septimus is naked and exposed to society's condemnation as he enters Sir William's residence. Woolf's treatment of Sir William is full of searing sarcasm.

Septimus and Rezia arrive and Sir William quickly diagnoses Septimus as in a state of "complete breakdown." Sir William laments that the couple has been trusting Dr. Holmes for so long. Sir William asks Septimus if he served with "great distinction" in the war, and Septimus can't even remember, though he remembers the war as a "little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder." Rezia answers for him, saying that Septimus was indeed a war hero.

Sir William is at least right to recognize that Septimus does have a problem, which is much better than Dr. Holmes did. The young Septimus had idealized reasons for fighting in the war, but now he cannot even remember why he suffered so much. Septimus has lost faith in England, and so cannot feel the pride that Rezia feels in his "distinction."

Septimus tries to confess to Sir William that he has committed a crime against human nature, but Rezia assures the doctor that this isn't true. Sir William takes Rezia aside and tells her that Septimus is very ill. He asks if Septimus has threatened suicide, and she admits that he has. Sir William says that Septimus must be separated from Rezia and sent to rest in a "beautiful house in the country." Sir William prefers not to talk of madness, but simply a lack of proportion.

Septimus is once again unable to communicate his true feelings, and the well-meaning Rezia talks over him. She is still acutely aware of society's judgment, and wants to minimize the "embarrassment" of Septimus's mental illness. We now start to see Sir William's "obscurely evil" nature – he is not interested in hearing Septimus's words, but only in sending him away.

Rezia is very upset by this, and when they give this news to Septimus he is wary of Sir William's "home." Sir William resents Septimus's distrust, as Sir William is the son of a tradesman and lacks the natural cultivation and bookishness Septimus still retains. Septimus adds "Bradshaw" (along with Holmes) to his idea of the human nature that tortures and condemns him.

Sir William's condemnation of Septimus has notes of jealousy in it, as Septimus has a natural intelligence, is well-read, and dares to question Sir William's authority. Septimus has seen the worst side of human nature in the war, and now he comes to associate doctors with that same nature – torturing and killing for no good reason.

Sir William tells Septimus that everyone has times of depression, but that no one lives for himself alone. He reminds Septimus that he has a brilliant career ahead of him. Septimus tries to confess his crime and reveal the message the voices told him to transmit, but he cannot remember anything. Sir William tells Rezia that he will make all the arrangements for Septimus's treatment and he dismisses the couple. Rezia is very upset and thinks that Sir William has failed them, and is "not a nice man."

Once again Septimus is unable to express his thoughts, and Sir William isn't even interested in hearing them. The doctor has a "one size fits all" approach for psychology, and if anyone doesn't conform to his ideas he automatically sends them away to be isolated and weakened. Rezia has a natural distrust of Sir William because of her love for Septimus and his individuality.

The narrator expands on Sir William's philosophy of "proportion." Sir William prescribes isolation, rest, and lots of food for the mentally ill, and he forbids them from having children. Sir William has grown so famous that his sense of "proportion" has affected all of England, and if anyone doesn't conform to his views then they are considered mad.

Woolf saves her most searing criticisms of the novel for Sir William, and it is clear that she has a personal grudge against doctors like this, who force their patients into their conceptions of conformity rather than truly engaging with them as individuals. Woolf herself suffered from mental illness and was also a very individual, non-conforming soul, so she often had to put up a front to avoid being condemned by people like Sir William.

The narrator says that Proportion has a sinister "sister," though, which is Conversion. This pressure to conform to social norms or religion can masquerade as charity or self-sacrifice, but in reality it is a quest for power. In English colonies like India this leads to the literal smashing up of idols, and in London Sir William goes about "colonizing" his patients' minds and converting them to Proportion.

Woolf spends a lot of time condemning conversion (whether to religion or conformity), as this is the greatest threat to the privacy of the soul that she holds so dear. In this way Sir William will connect to Doris Kilman later, and both are microcosms of the machine of the British Empire, destroying the individuality and "privacy" of its colonized nations.

Sir William's wife, Lady Bradshaw, is an example of this, as she once had a life of her own but it was subsumed into her husband's will fifteen years before. With all his mentally ill patients Sir William eventually overcomes their will and converts them to his worldview. When they ask for a reason to live or if God exists, he suggests that they are simply lacking a sense of proportion – they should live for worldly success, and if they cannot have that then they should accept what they have got.

Sir William's sense of proportion has become like a fundamentalist religion to him, and he is in a position of power to instill it into his helpless, mentally ill patients. If a patient asks something too philosophical – about God, their own individuality, or their power over their own life – he reinforces his dogma and insists they "convert" to his worldview.

If the patients will not be converted and retain their "unsocial impulses," then Sir William has them sent away. But usually he can impress his will on his weak, troubled patients, all while endearing himself to their relations. Rezia is an exception to this rule, as she dislikes Sir William after their consultation. She walks down Harley Street, and the clocks there seem to divide and eat away at time, to uphold conformity and promote proportion.

Time and the ticking of clocks mean many different things to characters in the novel, and to Rezia the uniform motion of clocks now seems to reinforce Sir William's demand to conform. After her initial (ironic) praise of Sir William's tact and philanthropy, Woolf now fully shows Sir William for what he is – a psychological bully.

The narrative now follows Hugh Whitbread, who is examining shoes and socks in a shop window. Hugh "brushes the surfaces" of things, dabbling in different hobbies and living in different places. There is no real substance to him, but he is always well-dressed and courteous. He is on his way to have lunch at Lady Bruton's with Richard Dalloway. Hugh brings Lady Bruton **carnations**, as he has on every visit for the last twenty years.

Woolf draws a significant connection between Sir William and Hugh now, as Hugh is the epitome of the conformity and "proportion" that Sir William worships. We get hardly anything from Hugh's inner dialogue, as Woolf seems to say that he has nothing underneath his outer appearance of gentility.

Hugh arrives and greets Lady Bruton's assistant, Milly Brush, who can't stand him. Lady Bruton, who is sixty-two, prefers Richard to Hugh but still feels that Hugh is kind and worthwhile. She does not like "cutting people up" the way Clarissa does. Richard arrives and Lady Bruton tells them that she wants their help, but they won't talk business until after lunch.

The upper class characters generally defend each other's flaws as they try to preserve tradition and their role as the elite. This is most tellingly shown in Lady Bruton defense of Hugh. Lady Bruton recognizes the differences between Clarissa and most others of her class—she recognizes Clarissa's ability to judge people, and refuses to engage in such behavior.

Lunch appears soundlessly and almost magically, with many delicious servings borne in by white-capped maids. Overall it creates an illusion that no one set the table, cooked the dishes, or paid for it all. Richard Dalloway watches Lady Bruton holding Hugh's **carnations** and thinks of how she looks just like her ancestor, the great general in the portrait behind her.

The greatest evil of a luncheon like this is the "invisibility" of all the servants and cooks. Part of the privilege of the upper class is that they don't have to look at the poor and engage with them. Peter can give a coin to the old woman and move on.

Richard thinks that Lady Bruton is like a general herself, and that he would have gladly served under her. He has great respect for her and likes well-set-up women from great families. Lady Bruton asks him about Clarissa, and Richard thinks of how Clarissa feels that Lady Bruton doesn't like her. Lady Bruton is indeed "more interested in politics than people," which is the opposite of Clarissa, and Lady Bruton feels that Clarissa may have held Richard back in his political career.

As with Peter and Clarissa's meeting, this luncheon involves little communication, but Woolf's free indirect discourse adds layers of meaning to the small talk. Lady Bruton is the most "feminist" character of the book, as she shrugs off the limitations of her gender, but she is also portrayed negatively because of her adherence to English tradition and conformity.

Hugh interrupts to say that he met Clarissa that morning. Lady Bruton says that Peter Walsh is back in town, and they all remember how passionately Peter had loved Clarissa, and how he had then "made a mess of things" in India. At that moment Richard decides that he will find Clarissa after lunch and tell her that he loves her.

Richard is a simple, traditional soul, but he is at least a kind man and does love Clarissa. The past at Bourton often seems more real than the present, and is overwhelming even at this luncheon where neither Clarissa, Peter, nor Sally are present.

Milly Brush feels that she might have been able to fall in love with Richard once. Richard, Lady Bruton, and Hugh all feel vaguely flattered that Peter Walsh has returned to England unsuccessful. They all want to help him but feel it is impossible "because of his character." Hugh asks for Peter's address and promises to write recommendations for him, but everyone knows it will come to nothing.

Everyone recognizes that Peter prefers fantasy and melodrama to genuine engagement and communication, so they realize that he will proudly reject any offer of help. Hugh still goes through the motions, though, as he has no sense of the deeper parts of someone's soul.

After the lunch is over Lady Bruton moves immediately to business. Her cause, which she is so wrapped up in that it has become an inseparable part of her, is Emigration – sending well-born young people to Canada, which at that time was an English colony. The narrator says she has "lost her sense of proportion" in her devotion to this cause. Lady Bruton wants to write a letter to the *Times* about emigration, but she is having great trouble, so she invited Richard and Hugh to help her.

Just as the source of the extravagant luncheon is invisible, so Lady Bruton tries to solve England's problems by exporting them to Canada. There is also a xenophobic aspect to this cause, as she is perhaps trying to "civilize" Canada with the English upper classes. Lady Bruton has "lost her sense of proportion" just like Septimus, but she is protected by her wealth and class.

Richard advises Lady Bruton on her points and Hugh writes the letter for her, as he knows how to appeal to editors. Richard thinks that Hugh's letter is nonsensical and flowery, but Lady Bruton loves it. She puts Hugh's **carnations** in the front of her dress and calls him "My **Prime Minister**!"

Lady Bruton, like most other characters, has a difficulty in communicating when trying to write her letter. Hugh seems like a smooth, effective communicator but his words carry no real weight. "Prime Minister" was an insult for Peter (when he suggested who Clarissa would marry), but it is a compliment for Lady Bruton and Hugh, again highlighting their connection to tradition and inability to see beyond that tradition.

The two men leave, and on his way out Richard admires the portrait of Lady Bruton's ancestor. He has been planning on writing a history of her family, which has consisted of many great military men. Richard will do this when he has some leisure time – when the Labour Party comes into power. Richard reminds Lady Bruton of Clarissa's party, and she says that she might or might not come.

Though Lady Bruton is a powerful, independent woman, Woolf shows how irrelevant she is to modern life here. Instead of affecting the future, she and her family are fitting subjects for history books. Richard is a member of the Conservative Party, which is about to be replaced by the more liberal Labour Party.

After the men leave Lady Bruton lies down "majestically" on the sofa. She gets sleepy and imagines herself as a girl, riding on a pony with her brothers out in the country. Then she returns to the present and is pleased at having such able, respectable men (like Richard and Hugh) as her friends. Hugh and Richard seem attached to Lady Bruton by a thread, which grows thinner as they move farther away. Finally the thread snaps and Lady Bruton falls asleep.

Woolf now shows Lady Bruton's naïveté by having her consider Richard and Hugh such fine examples of men – particularly Hugh, as Richard is actually able and goodhearted. With the image of the thread Woolf adds to the idea of an extensive network of overlapping characters, individual souls who sometimes brush against each other.

Hugh and Richard walk along together and look in some shop windows. Hugh admires a Spanish necklace and considers buying it for his wife Evelyn. Richard follows him into the store, drawn along by the mere force of inertia, as he doesn't particularly like Hugh and doesn't care at all about Emigration.

Even the conventional, unimaginative Richard dislikes Hugh, as Richard is a man of honesty and principles, and Hugh is all about surfaces and excess. We finally get Richard's point of view and find him more sympathetic.

Hugh demands to be seen by a particular clerk and Richard considers buying something for Clarissa. He once gave her a bracelet, but she never wears it, which pains him to remember. Richard thinks about Elizabeth and about Peter Walsh's passionate love for Clarissa. He notes that Hugh is being even more pompous than normal, and is "becoming an intolerable ass." Richard leaves the store.

Richard recognizes that he lacks the passion and drama of Peter, and so he avoids making romantic gestures to Clarissa even though he loves her in his own way. Hugh never has to face repercussions for his sins because of his wealth and status.

Richard heads home to see Clarissa, feeling especially affectionate because of his thoughts of Peter Walsh. He buys a bouquet of red and white **roses** to bring to her, and plans to say "I love you" to her, which he hasn't said in years. Richard suddenly feels that their relationship and life together is a miracle considering the war, and he thinks that he should declare his love more often.

Richard shows his lack of poetry in the way he handles flowers, "bearing them like a weapon" in the next section. Clarissa, by contrast, feels comforted and rejuvenated among flowers. Richard doesn't have to deal with the war in the way Septimus does, but he does appreciate how lucky he is.

Richard passes some homeless children and police, and he thinks about his desire for social reform. In Green Park he walks past a homeless woman reclining on the ground, looking as if "rid of all ties." Richard approaches her "bearing his **flowers** like a weapon," and the woman laughs at him. He smiles and walks on, considering the problem of vagrancy but not wanting to actually talk to the woman.

Richard is a kind man who works to help the poor, but he still avoids actually engaging and communicating with people outside his social class. The vagrant woman is powerless in English society, but she still has power in her freedom and individuality, like Sally as a youth.

Richard thinks of Peter Walsh and how he used to be jealous of Peter. Now he agrees with Clarissa when she says she was right not to marry Peter, as Richard feels that Clarissa needs support, and Peter could not have supported her. Richard passes Buckingham Palace and thinks about how it is dignified and symbolic, but also a little silly. Richard likes the tradition of the monarchy, though he recognizes its basic hollowness.

Richard loves Clarissa, but he still thinks of her in female stereotypes, as a woman who needs his support. He is right that Peter would have been an emotional drain, though. Richard also recognizes the absurdity and meaningless of the English hierarchy, but he still chooses to believe in it because it gives him comfort.

At home, Clarissa is upset because her "dull" cousin Ellie Henderson has asked to come to her party, and now she cannot refuse. She is also irritated that Elizabeth is currently holed up with Doris Kilman, praying. **Big Ben** strikes three and at that moment Richard enters. He gives her the **roses** but is unable to say "I love you," though he feels she understands.

Clarissa is at her snobbiest here, especially when we learn that Ellie Henderson is poorer than everyone else invited to the party. Richard fails at true communication and is unable to even confess his love verbally. That he feels Clarissa understands is not a guarantee that she does understand, and so much human interaction is full of just that sort of uncertainty.

Richard wants Clarissa to take a break from her preparations, and they sit down together. Richard holds her hand and thinks "happiness is this" while Clarissa complains about Ellie Henderson and Doris Kilman. Richard has to go to a meeting about Armenians (or Albanians, Clarissa can't remember), and Clarissa thinks about the gulf between every person, even a husband and wife.

Richard's meeting is about the Armenian Genocide, and we see how Richard, though dull and unimaginative, is actually trying to do some good in the world, while Clarissa's life is still painfully insular. Clarissa's thoughts on the loneliness of the soul condense one the novel's main themes.

Before he leaves, Richard sets Clarissa up for "an hour's complete rest after luncheon," as per the doctor's orders, and Clarissa muses on his "adorable, divine simplicity." She recognizes that she cares more for parties than for politics, "more for her **roses** than for the Armenians," but she grows suddenly unhappy because Richard and Peter criticize and trivialize her love of throwing parties. Clarissa realizes that she just likes life, and she has parties as a kind of an offering, though she doesn't know to whom.

Clarissa's regimented post-influenza existence is similar to Woolf's own. Because of her nervous breakdowns and headaches, Woolf's husband Leonard kept her on a strict schedule. This is sort of the thesis statement for Clarissa's current existence – her instinctual love of life, and her desire to bring people together and spread this joy. Just as in Peter's dream, where he wondered who he could reply to, Clarissa doesn't know to whom she is offering her parties. There is no God or savior for these modern characters – they must find answers alone.

Clarissa thinks about how this is her only gift – having parties as an offering of life. She thinks about the events of the day and how unbelievable death is, considering all the moments and sensations that must someday end. She drifts off to sleep.

Death is paradoxical in its existence in the novel – it is always at hand, just on the other side of joy and optimism, but at the same time it seems impossible that all the infinite threads of life should suddenly be cut off.

Elizabeth comes in quietly, knowing that her mother is resting. The narrator describes her as darker and more exotic-looking than her parents. She is seventeen and has recently grown very serious. Miss Kilman waits for her outside the room, wearing her mackintosh. Miss Kilman wears the mackintosh because she is poor and she has no desire to please anyone with her appearance. She finds Clarissa rich, shallow, and condescending, but admits that Richard is kind.

We finally delve into the point of view of Elizabeth and Miss Kilman. Miss Kilman is the opposite of Clarissa – poor, unattractive, charmless, and bitter against life. But even Miss Kilman is (at least at first) a sympathetic character because of her situation, as she has had none of the privileges Clarissa had in her life.

Doris Kilman feels that she has been cheated out of happiness in life. She has always been poor, clumsy, and unattractive. At the school she had taught at she was fired because of her German ancestry and her sympathetic views of Germany during the war – simply saying that they were not all monsters. Then Richard Dalloway found her and hired her as a tutor for Elizabeth.

We first learn of all the reasons Miss Kilman has to justify her bitterness. Germany was portrayed as evil during the war, and having any kind of view that contradicted that opened one up to discrimination.

Miss Kilman had been converted to Christianity two years earlier, and since then she feels that she doesn't envy women like Clarissa, but only pities them. In reality she despises Clarissa, and wishes all the fine ladies like her could be sent to work in a factory. Miss Kilman had been converted when she went into a church, weeping with bitterness and hatred. Now she tries to think of God whenever this hatred returns.

Miss Kilman is justified in her unhappiness, but she crosses the line when she uses her bitterness as fuel for her desire for conversion and domination. She is like Sir William, trying to violate the privacy of the soul with conversion, though Miss Kilman is a poor woman and so lacks Sir William's power and effectiveness.

Looking at Clarissa, Doris Kilman thinks of God and suddenly feels serene and righteous. Clarissa gets up to greet Miss Kilman (while Elizabeth goes to get her gloves), and Miss Kilman feels a desire to "fell her" and show her mastery over Clarissa. She wants to make Clarissa cry, but she wants to do it with religious righteousness. Clarissa is shocked by the hatred in Miss Kilman's eyes and cannot believe that this woman is trying to steal Elizabeth from her.

Clarissa's sister was killed by a falling tree, and Miss Kilman now wants to "fell" Clarissa. Elsewhere in the novel trees (with their complex systems of branches and roots) have been associated with souls, and so this implies that Doris Kilman wants to "fell" souls just like Sir William. Clarissa, who is sensitive to the individuality of the soul (just like Septimus), is horrified by this.

Elizabeth returns and Doris Kilman's threat, which is like a "prehistoric monster," suddenly seems to shrink and crumble. Clarissa laughs at Miss Kilman and says goodbye. She calls out for Elizabeth to remember her party. After they are gone, Clarissa thinks that love and religion are the cruelest things in the world, always trying to dominate and convert others.

Clarissa's hatred for Miss Kilman was described as a kind of monster, and now Miss Kilman is a monster herself. Love and religion are usually portrayed as positive ideals for humanity, but to Clarissa (and perhaps to Woolf as well) their tendency to try and convert and dominate others makes them harmful.

Clarissa looks out the window and watches an old woman in the house opposite hers climb upstairs and look out the window. The old woman has no idea she is being watched, and Clarissa is comforted by this. Somehow the old woman's existence reassures her of the "privacy of the soul," the thing that love, religion, and the Doris Kilmans of the world try to destroy. Clarissa and the old woman have been neighbors for years but have never spoken.

Woolf's most famous essay is called "A Room of One's Own," and throughout her work separate rooms act as representations of individual souls. This scene condenses the heart of the novel, and the paradox between aloneness and communication. The lack of communication between Clarissa and the old woman is tragic in a way, but at the same time it comforts Clarissa about the privacy of the soul. Clarissa watching the old woman also resonates with the singing woman's words: "If some one should see, what matter they?"

Love seems just as bad as religion to Clarissa, and she thinks of Peter Walsh as an example – he is a wonderful man intellectually and by himself, but when he is in love he becomes selfish and vulgar. **Big Ben** strikes three-thirty, and Clarissa thinks that neither Miss Kilman's religion nor Peter Walsh's love solve the mystery of the soul. The true heart of life exists in the fact that the old woman has her room, and Clarissa has her own.

The paradox of privacy and communication for Clarissa, Septimus, and Woolf is that human souls are inherently alone, as true communication is difficult or impossible – we all exist in separate rooms – but there can also be a comfort in this privacy. The windows and doors of these rooms then become means of connection and communication. Clarissa takes the door off its hinges to throw her party, which is in itself an attempt to reach out to other people.

Doris Kilman goes outside with Elizabeth, trying to control her hatred of Clarissa. Miss Kilman thinks that Clarissa laughed at her for her ugliness, and she tries to suppress her desire to resemble Clarissa. Despite her desire to "master" Clarissa, Miss Kilman was almost reduced to tears by her laughter.

Doris Kilman has been badly treated by fate and society, but she uses this unfairness as a justification for hatred and domination. Kilman's personal tragedy is that she fails even in this, as Clarissa can overcome her simply with laughter.

Miss Kilman walks and prays, thinking bitterly that she has been denied all the pleasures and luxuries that were given to Clarissa Dalloway. All Miss Kilman lives for now is Elizabeth, food, and her small comforts of tea and a hot-water bottle at night. She thinks of her pastor's words, saying that she must suffer to gain knowledge, but Miss Kilman feels that no one suffers like she does.

All of Miss Kilman's pleasures come from the jealous possession of something, even her self-pity, as she enjoys thinking that no one suffers as she does. It is this possessiveness that is so horrifying to sensitive individuals like Clarissa.

Elizabeth guides Miss Kilman into the Army and Navy Stores, where Miss Kilman distractedly buys a petticoat. They have tea and Miss Kilman eats "with intensity," feeling resentment at a little girl who eats the pink cake she wanted. Miss Kilman talks to Elizabeth about how not everyone thinks the English are "invariably right," and tells her that all professions are open to women of her generation.

Elizabeth is a rather passive character, but she is interested in the ideas Miss Kilman proposes. She seems unaware or uncaring of Miss Kilman's possessive love, however, and Clarissa's fear that Elizabeth is "falling in love" with Miss Kilman seems unfounded.

Elizabeth thinks about how her mother and Miss Kilman are opposites and don't get along, but Elizabeth respects both women and recognizes that her mother makes an effort to be kind to Miss Kilman. Once Clarissa had offered Miss Kilman **flowers** from Bourton, and Miss Kilman had squashed them in a bunch.

Flowers again act as a symbol of beauty and the joy in life, as Miss Kilman squashes them in her domineering hand. Elizabeth seems remarkably disinterested and wise for her age, though she takes little action of her own.

Elizabeth soon feels stifled by Miss Kilman's litany of self-pity, and she says she has to go. Miss Kilman is desperate to keep Elizabeth with her, and she makes her wait until she finishes her tea. Miss Kilman longs to have total possession over Elizabeth, thinking that she "genuinely loves" her, and she fears that Elizabeth will leave her for Clarissa. Miss Kilman continues her self-pitying tirade, though she knows it is unappealing to Elizabeth.

There is another undercurrent of homosexual attraction in Miss Kilman's possessive love for Elizabeth, but again it is repressed and so leads to unhealthy consequences. As a force of domination and conversion (like Sir William) Doris Kilman's love is not romantic or intimate, but possessive and crushing of the individual being loved.

Finally Elizabeth gets up, pays, and leaves, and Miss Kilman feels broken. Elizabeth has left her, and with her has gone youth and beauty. She thinks that Clarissa Dalloway has triumphed. Miss Kilman blunders off through the streets in a daze and then goes into Westminster Cathedral to pray. Even within the cathedral she thinks resentfully that it is easier for other churchgoers to pray than it is for her.

Unlike Sir William, Doris Kilman is ineffective in her attempts to "colonize" other people's souls. She is poor and female, and so has no power in this society – she is truly a tragic character, unhappy and bitter and trying to spread her unhappiness to others, but totally ineffective.

Elizabeth is pleased to be alone, and wishes she lived in the country with her father and dogs instead of in London. She gets on an omnibus, but has no particular destination. People have started to notice Elizabeth's beauty, and she finds the invitations to parties and the streams of compliments boring – men comparing her to **flowers**, trees, and other clichéd poetic images.

Elizabeth's thoughts reflect Peter's musings on Richard (as a man who should live in the country with dogs), and show how Elizabeth is closer to her father than to her mother. Woolf shows the more clichéd side of the flower symbol, as it becomes boring when used to describe female beauty. There is also a hint of the way that beauty becomes a kind of trap for the beautiful, forcing them into convention through the attention of others.

Elizabeth is delighted to be free of Miss Kilman's self-pity, and she enjoys the freedom of the omnibus. She considers what she should do with her life. She likes people and animals who are "ill," and so thinks of becoming a doctor, a farmer, or a member of Parliament. She rides the bus through the Strand, a busy, working-class area that her parents never visit.

Elizabeth considers the career options becoming more open to women now – the things Doris Kilman listed while pitying herself for having no such options. Elizabeth at least seems to take a greater interest in the poor than most members of her class.

Elizabeth thinks that her ideas about a career are silly, and she recognizes that she is rather lazy, so she will mention them to no one. Elizabeth tries to find a clock, knowing that her mother wants her home soon. It is later than she had thought, so Elizabeth boards another bus and returns home.

Elizabeth has a good heart and considers her future, but she takes little real action and merely drifts about on the omnibus. It seems unlikely that she will take any radical action in her life to help others or change her own status.

Meanwhile Septimus is sitting on the couch at home, watching sunlight play along the wallpaper and thinking of the line from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* – "Fear no more." Rezia is sitting at the table, making a hat. She sees Septimus smile but she is disturbed by it.

Septimus starts to grow ecstatic at the beauty in everyday life, just as Clarissa does, and he shares her meditations on the quote from Cymbeline.

Rezia thinks of the strange things Septimus has been doing lately, like talking to Evans, writing down bits of nonsense (some of it beautiful, though), and talking about Dr. Holmes as a representation of something horrible. Rezia feels that he is no longer her husband, and so they no longer have a real marriage.

Rezia feels that gulf between husband and wife that Clarissa was describing to herself. Rezia feels that Septimus is a wholly different person since his illness, and a stranger to her now.

Rezia is making a hat for Mrs. Peters, the large, married daughter of Mrs. Filmer, the Smith's neighbor. Rezia talks aloud about her work and Septimus opens his eyes cautiously, noticing the "real things" around him. Septimus feels suddenly lucid, contrasting his mad prophesying with the mundane details of Mrs. Peters' life.

Septimus starts to experience a time of sanity and happiness just before he is reminded of cruel human nature. He can see the world clearly now, and is comforted by the mundane life around him, the kind of bustle and gossip that Clarissa delights in.

Septimus says the hat is too small for Mrs. Peters, and he starts to speak in a lucid way for the first time in weeks. Septimus jokes with Rezia, who is overjoyed. Septimus has a good eye for color, and he designs the hat. Rezia starts stitching it together, and Septimus feels that he is in a warm place, like on the edge of the woods. When it is done, Septimus feels that the hat is the greatest accomplishment of his life.

The image of threads as connecting souls is appropriate for this scene, as Rezia and Septimus finally have a moment of intimacy and communication while dong something prosaic: sewing together a hat. This reprieve of happiness makes the following scene all the more tragic.

In the future Rezia will always like this hat, and cherish the happy memory of making it with Septimus. There is a tap on the door and Rezia worries that it is Sir William, but it is the small girl who delivers them the evening paper. Rezia kisses the child, brings her some sweets, and dances her around the room. Septimus reads the paper and starts to get tired, but he feels very happy. He falls asleep.

The girl is Mrs. Filmer's granddaughter, and Rezia is made even more joyful by her appearance, as Rezia had always wanted children. The knock on the door is a reminder of the outside world, though, and the men trying to dominate Septimus's fragile soul.

Septimus wakes up and is terrified to find that he is alone. Rezia has gone to bring the girl back to her mother. Septimus thinks that he is doomed to be alone forever as punishment for being unable to feel. His visions of beautiful objects are gone, and he is surrounded by ordinary things. Septimus calls out for Evans, but there is no answer.

Septimus seems to suddenly feel the "emptiness at the heart of life" that Clarissa did when she returned from her morning stroll. There was a comfort in Septimus's beautiful fantasies, and now they are gone and he is left to dread the approach of Sir William's condemnation.

Rezia returns, talking about Mrs. Peters. She feels happy and comfortable with Septimus now, like she can be honest with him. She remembers the first time they met, when he seemed like a shy young hawk. She asks Septimus's opinion about the hat, and they both dread the approaching arrival of Sir William's message, which will send Septimus to be committed.

Septimus and Rezia both feel the approach of the overbearing doctors now, and they try to preserve the happy moment they have created. Rezia is overjoyed to finally feel less alone.

Septimus asks why he must be separated from Rezia, and asks why Sir William has the right to control his life. Rezia says that it is because Septimus threatened suicide. Septimus feels that he has been overpowered by both Holmes and Bradshaw now. Septimus asks Rezia for the papers on which he and Rezia had written down all his ramblings. He tells Rezia to burn them all, but Rezia wants to save them because some are beautiful, so she ties them up with silk.

Now that he is lucid, Septimus sees how he has been dominated by the doctors and forced to conform to Sir William's conventions. He tries to preserve the poetry of his soul by burning his papers and saving them from Holmes and Bradshaw.

Rezia promises to go wherever Septimus goes, and as she gathers the papers and ties them up Septimus thinks of her as a "**flowering** tree," a fearless sanctuary, a "miracle" to triumph over Holmes and Bradshaw. Rezia goes to pack their things so that they won't be separated if Septimus is sent away.

An individual is again compared to a tree, and flowers are again associated with women and beauty. Septimus sees Rezia's individuality and love as a haven against human nature.

Rezia hears Dr. Holmes downstairs and runs to prevent him coming up. Holmes pushes his way past her, saying he is there "as a friend," and heads up the stairs. Septimus hears him coming and thinks of different ways to kill himself and escape. He finally decides to throw himself from the window.

When Dr. Holmes arrives Septimus sees his choice as killing himself or giving up his soul to the doctors. He is trying to escape the embodiment of repulsive human nature, but also to defy it by controlling his own fate.

Septimus does not want to die, as "life was good" and "the sun hot." He thinks that his death will be the doctors' idea of a tragedy, not his or Rezia's. Septimus looks out the window and sees an old man coming down the staircase in the apartment across the way. The old man stops and stares at him, and Holmes opens the door. Septimus yells "I'll give it you!" and throws himself out the window, landing on Mrs. Filmer's railings.

If rooms act as sealed, incommunicable souls, then windows are a kind of bridge between them, and so Septimus's means of suicide becomes a kind of desperate act of communication. The old man across the way reflects Clarissa's old woman in the window, but the old man is leaving the privacy of his room. Septimus also leaves his privacy even as he sacrifices himself to preserve his agency and individuality. The quote from Cymbeline appears again. Septimus's last words show that he is making an "offering" of his death – no one is taking it from him – just as Clarissa's parties are an offering.

Dr. Holmes immediately calls Septimus a coward, but Rezia now understands her husband. Mrs. Filmer rushes in and she and Holmes try to comfort Rezia. Holmes gives her a sweet drink that makes her sleepy, and he wonders aloud what reason Septimus could possibly have for killing himself.

Septimus had obviously threatened suicide many times, so Dr. Holmes is being purposefully ignorant to absolve himself of blame. He immediately drugs Rezia, keeping her from perceiving Holmes's guilt too clearly (though it is unclear if Holme's is himself also blind to his own guilt).

The clock strikes as Rezia gets sleepy, and she thinks about the war and her happy memories with Septimus. Holmes says that Rezia should not watch as Septimus's body is carried away, as it is so mangled. Rezia sees Dr. Holmes's outline against the window just as she falls asleep, and she thinks, "So that was Dr. Holmes."

Septimus's death is tragic, but even Rezia immediately thinks happy thoughts about her husband and seems to "understand" his act. Woolf creates the suicide so that it is almost a positive action, a desperate but viable way of dealing with the loneliness and cruelty of the world. It's worth noting that Woolf herself also eventually committed suicide.

SECTION 8

Peter Walsh hears the ambulance rush by to pick up Septimus's body, and he thinks of ambulances as a triumph of civilization. The English health system seems admirable to him after India, and he admires how all the cars and carriages stop to let the ambulance pass. Peter thinks of how easily the ambulance could be coming for him, and as he grows sentimental and morbid thinks that this is the "privilege of loneliness" – he can think whatever he wants in privacy.

The irony of this moment is brutal, as it is the very "civilized" health system of England that drove Septimus to suicide. Peter also muses on the privacy of the soul, but he prefers to use this privacy for imagining and fantasizing instead of delving beneath the surfaces of things.

Peter remembers how he and Clarissa used to ride the omnibus and explore London together. Clarissa had a theory then that to know someone, you also had to know all the people and places that "completed" that person. She thought that people existed beyond their single selves, and so might even survive beyond death through the attachments and memories of others.

Clarissa's theory connects with the web of interconnection Woolf has created throughout the novel. Septimus is dead now, but he will live on in the soul of a seemingly random woman (Clarissa). Though this external "completion" of personhood seems to contradict the privacy of the soul, there is a kind of connection between characters in the novel, even if it is a connection founded on separation, on the confusions and failures of trying to communicate.

Peter reminisces about his thirty-year-long friendship with Clarissa. They have fought often, but overall Clarissa has influenced him more than anyone else. Peter returns to his hotel and reminisces about Bourton. He and Clarissa would walk in the woods, argue, and discuss people, poetry, and politics (Clarissa was a "Radical" then).

Peter's thoughts continually return to Clarissa and their time at Bourton, undercutting his frequent reassurances that he doesn't love her anymore. Peter and Clarissa once shared intimate communication in an intellectual way.

Peter goes to his room and finds a letter from Clarissa, saying how "heavenly" it was to see him that morning. He is upset by this and wishes she would have "let him be," left him to remember the old days before she married Richard and lived "in perfect happiness." Peter suddenly finds the hotel cold and impersonal.

Peter is interrupted in his nostalgia by the "conventional" Clarissa of the present, the woman who rejected his marriage proposal and chose Richard instead. This frivolous note is a contrast to the old conversations Peter and Clarissa used to have.

Peter imagines the moments after their meeting that afternoon – he pictures Clarissa regretting her refusal of Peter's marriage proposal, wishing that she had changed the world with him instead of slipping into middle-aged conventionality with Richard. Peter imagines Clarissa weeping as she wrote him the note.

Clarissa's note interrupted Peter's fantasies, but he immediately returns to his imagination and pictures a reality in which Clarissa regrets rejecting him.

Peter has been successful with women recently, and the narrator muses about why this is – it may be that he is both respectable-looking and unsure about life, and can be easily ensnared by a young woman. Peter takes off his boots and looks at a photo of Daisy with a fox-terrier on her knee. She is dark and beautiful, and looks much more "natural" than Clarissa. Their relationship has also been very different, as Daisy caused Peter no torment and totally adores him.

Peter's main experience of love has been with Clarissa, which was very different than his relationship with Daisy. Peter continues to criticize Clarissa as he tries to prove to himself that he loves Daisy more than Clarissa now.

Peter thinks about his situation and wonders if marrying Daisy would be a good idea. She would probably lose her two young children and the respect of society. Peter imagines himself as a man of the world, writing books, having left Daisy behind to idealize him from afar. Then Peter feels dissatisfied with himself, and wonders why he cannot keep out of social situations and women's company despite his love of privacy.

Peter feels the paradox of being an introverted, privacy-loving person and also desiring the company of others. This seems like an aspect of Woolf's personality as well – she was a solitary writer, but she also loved the activity of London much more than the quietness of the country.

Peter dislikes the idea of staying devoted to Daisy, but he knows he would be furious if she was with anyone else. He interrupts his musings to go down to dinner. The other hotel guests find Peter interesting and respectable based on his appearance and composure in dealing with the waiter, especially the way he orders "Bartlett pears." The guests want to talk to him, and eventually they make small talk.

At his hotel, where no one knows the "real" Peter, he is able to present himself at his best, or as the kind of man he wants to be – composed, dignified, and self-assured. His order of "Bartlett pears" is like Septimus's moment of lucidity, a brief reprieve from Peter's usual mood swings, fantasies, and self-doubt.

Peter makes up his mind to go to Clarissa's party. He tells himself that he wants to ask Richard about what the Conservatives are doing in India, and he wants to hear the latest gossip. Peter then thinks of the human soul as something swimming along deep underwater, suddenly needing to leap to the surface, brush against other souls, and gossip together.

Peter's image of the soul as a fish-like thing resonates with Woolf's other work, particularly the novel The Waves. *It is also similar to her image of the soul as a tree, with much of it underground but its branches sometimes brushing against other trees.*

Peter sits down in a wicker chair on the hotel steps and watches the city wake up for the evening. The night is lighter than he is used to, as daylight savings has been introduced to England while he was away. He watches the young people pass by on their way to the movies and admires their fashion. He remembers Clarissa's Aunt Helena, who pressed **flowers**, had a glass eye, and seemed to belong to a different era.

Peter often assures himself that he isn't getting old, but he also enjoys watching how English civilization has changed while he has been away. Aunt Helena is the woman who was shocked by Sally's actions at Bourton, and is a representative of an older, more traditional era.

Peter muses that the past and tradition can enrich experience, and then he sets off for Clarissa's with great expectations. As he walks he looks at the lighted windows of people's houses, each with a different kind of life behind it, and he admires the beauty and richness of life. When Peter comes to Clarissa's house he makes his soul "brave itself to endure," opens his pocketknife, and goes inside.

Peter has a similar revelation to Clarissa, looking into the window of each person's room and observing the individual souls residing within. However frivolous Clarissa's party seems to Peter, it is still a place with the potential for communication – something that frightens him – so he must steel himself before going in.

SECTION 9

Lucy and the other Dalloway servants hurry about, making last-minute preparations for the party. They hear that the **Prime Minister** will be there, but the cook says that this makes no difference for her work. The guests start arriving and the ladies go upstairs while the men order Imperial Tokay (a sweet wine) from the kitchen. Elizabeth worries about her dog and reminds a servant to check on it.

The Prime Minister is an important symbol of order and hierarchy for many English people, but he has no real affect on working-class people like the cook. The first details of Clarissa's party seem especially indulgent after Septimus's suicide.

Guests keep arriving and the men finally go upstairs to join the women. There are servants specially hired for the party, including an old woman who has been helping the family for forty years. Clarissa greets everyone with "How delightful to see you!" Peter Walsh arrives and finds her "at her worst – effusive, insincere." He wishes he had stayed home with a book.

It is also disturbing that the party is a gathering place for the bubble of the English upper class, those who oppress the likes of Septimus. Clarissa has given meaning to her party as an "offering" and an attempt to bring people together, but for now she is acting just as shallowly as Peter feared.

Clarissa sees Peter in the corner, criticizing her with his eyes, and she worries that the party will be a failure. She wonders why she invites such failure and criticism on herself, but then resolves that she would rather burn up while throwing a party than fade away like her cousin, Ellie Henderson. She gets angry at Peter for criticizing everything but never offering something of his own.

Clarissa has a similar sentiment to Septimus (though to a different degree), as her party is her idea of defying human nature and "burning up" by doing something glorious. The party is Clarissa's offering, but Peter has no offerings of his own to put forth and risk criticism.

Ellie Henderson is there, admiring all the people at the party. She is poorer and less fashionable than everyone else there and gets nervous when someone talks to her, but she enjoys admiring all the interesting, influential guests. She takes mental notes to describe the event to someone named Edith later.

We briefly see the point of view of Ellie Henderson, Clarissa's cousin whom she tried not to invite. Ellie stands off by herself without talking. Her relationship with Edith is never explained, but they are perhaps romantic partners.

The wind blows a curtain out and a guest beats it back and keeps talking. Clarissa takes this as a sign that the party has really begun and might be successful after all. Guests keep arriving, but Clarissa isn't enjoying herself yet. She feels that she has become an unreal figure, and anyone could take her place as hostess. Lady Bruton arrives, and then the butler announces an unfamiliar name – Lady Rosseter – who turns out to be Sally Seton.

The flapping curtains at Bourton were Clarissa's first memory introduced in the book, and they again connect to the idea of windows as borders between private souls. The guest beating back the curtain then shows that he is engaged in true communication, and willing to push past the windows between himself and the other person.

Sally hasn't seen Clarissa in years, but she happened to be in London and heard about the party. Clarissa immediately sees that the "the lustre had gone out of" Sally, and she is now "older, happier, less lovely," but she still greets her joyfully. With a touch of her old bravado, Sally boasts that she has "five enormous boys."

We have only seen Sally in Clarissa's memory before now, and that past Sally seems more real somehow than this conventional lady. Clarissa is like Peter, still haunted by the passion and romance of the past, and now she is disappointed by the presence of the real Sally.

The **Prime Minister** arrives, interrupting Clarissa and Sally's reunion. In his appearance he looks ordinary and almost laughable, but everyone still feels the silent presence of "this symbol of what they all stood for, English society." He makes his rounds and then goes off with Lady Bruton. Peter watches this and criticizes the "snobbery of the English."

People had talked about the Prime Minister in the royal car, and he has appeared as a symbol of tradition and conventionality in Peter's insult to Clarissa, but when he finally appears in the flesh he is painfully ordinary. He tries to act as the figurehead he is, as everyone in England is desperate for symbols of order, but he still appears absurd.

Peter then sees Hugh Whitbread and mocks him mercilessly in his thoughts, watching Hugh patronizing and flattering other guests. Then he sees Clarissa in her "silver-green mermaid's dress" and feels that she still has her ability "to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed." Peter reminds himself that he doesn't love her anymore.

Peter stands apart just like Ellie Henderson, but he feels himself superior to the other guests instead of watching them in awe. Clarissa still has the gift of a special kind of reality for Peter, something that cuts through his doubts and fantasies.

Clarissa shows the **Prime Minister** out. She feels the intoxication and pleasure of the party now, but it all seems hollow to her. She remembers Miss Kilman and revels in the sincerity and strength of the hatred she inspires. Clarissa returns to the party and talks to more of her guests, including the failed painter Sir Harry.

Clarissa is pleased that her party is a success, but she is almost looking at it through Peter's eyes now, and it seems less than sincere. Her hatred for Miss Kilman is a negative emotion, but it is at least real and pure, like her old love for Sally.

Old Mrs. Hilbery tells Clarissa that she looks like her mother, and Clarissa is suddenly moved to tears. Two intellectuals are arguing about Milton, and Clarissa interrupts them to smooth things over. More younger guests arrive, and then Clarissa's old Aunt Helena, who is over eighty now. She talks about Burma and **orchids**, and Clarissa sends Peter to talk to her.

Aunt Helena still survives as a relic of the past. The flower symbol continues here, as Helena was a former botanist and spent much of her life pressing orchids to preserve them. Such drying and preservation shows another version of "felling" the spontaneous beauty and joy of the soul.

Clarissa speaks briefly with Lady Bruton. Both women respect each other, but they have little to say. Lady Bruton then talks to Peter Walsh and Aunt Helena about India. The narrator describes Lady Bruton's love of the British Empire and how her Englishness is inseparable from her soul.

Lady Bruton and Clarissa are two different kinds of strong women, but they have hardly anything in common. Lady Bruton is innovative as a female "general," but traditional and conservative in her love of the Empire.

Sally catches Clarissa by the arm, but Clarissa is still busy entertaining. She asks Peter and Sally to stay, meaning that they will talk after the other guests have left. Clarissa watches Sally and Peter reuniting and thinks about her old passion for Sally. When she was young Clarissa had felt that Sally would end up a martyr of some kind, but instead Sally had married a rich man and had five boys. Clarissa thinks that her past belongs to Peter and Sally more than to anyone else.

With Sally and Peter's appearance the party is now a gathering place for memories of Bourton. Just as Richard couldn't tell Clarissa he loved her, so Clarissa seems to put off the moment of real, intimate communication that should occur between her and her oldest friends. She still has to deal with her image of the old Sally and how much she has changed.

The Bradshaws arrive and Clarissa is obligated to speak to them. She dislikes Sir William, though she can't pinpoint why. Sir William mentions a case of "shell shock," and then Lady Bradshaw tells Clarissa about Septimus's suicide. Clarissa is struck by the sudden arrival of death at her party, and angry at the Bradshaws for bringing it. She goes into a little room to be alone.

The appearance of Sir William at the party is especially sinister, as we have seen how he is partially responsible for Septimus's death. As in her first memory from Bourton, Clarissa again finds death in the midst of joy and optimism. She is a social person, but still must retreat to a "room of her own" to deal with this news.

Clarissa muses on Septimus's death and thinks of it as an act of communication and defiance, a preservation of something that she has obscured in her own life with chatter and frivolity. Clarissa remembers the time at Bourton when she went down to meet Sally and thought "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy." She imagines Septimus as having a passionate soul and then being coldly overpowered by Sir William.

Clarissa's revelations here are the climax of the novel and the condensation of Woolf's themes. Clarissa recognizes that she has obscured the purity of her soul with conventionality and shallowness, and sees how Septimus – her double, though they never met – has preserved that purity through his death. Clarissa did not die at the peak of her happiness at Bourton, but (like Othello, who lived on to jealously murder his wife) has instead lived and faded like Ellie Henderson.

Clarissa thinks of Septimus's death as somehow "her disaster – her disgrace." She has chosen conventionality and life over "the terrace at Bourton," where she felt romantic joy and a terrible premonition. Clarissa looks out her window and sees the old woman across the way staring straight at her. The woman goes to bed and **Big Ben** strikes three o'clock in the morning.

Clarissa feels that Septimus's death is her "disgrace" because she lacked his bravery, instead settling for a life of upper-class comfort and conformity with Richard. She thinks again of the window at Bourton, the place of great joy and the premonition of death, a time of pure communication – just like the window Septimus threw himself from. She then sees the old woman behind her closed windows, and sees how difficult communication has grown as she has gotten older.

Clarissa hears the noises of the party and knows she must go back out. She thinks again of the line from *Cymbeline*: "Fear no more the heat of the sun." She suddenly identifies with Septimus and is glad that he killed himself, as it makes the beauty and joy of life all the more precious. She goes back to the party, looking for Peter and Sally.

Clarissa has this moment of enlightenment and pure communion with Septimus, even though he is dead. As in Clarissa's old theory, Septimus lives on in his effect on others. Clarissa sees his death as a positive act of communication and defiance, and it gives her a clarity and gratitude regarding her own life. She is now ready to experience intimate communication again, and to reunite with Peter and Sally.

Meanwhile Peter and Sally are reminiscing about the past and wondering where Clarissa is. They discuss their current lives and realize how they have changed so much from their younger selves, and have failed the dreams of their past in a way. Sally talks about Clarissa, and admits that she was disappointed that Clarissa married Richard.

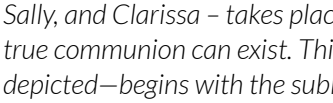
We no longer see the world from Clarissa's point of view after this revelation of hers. In this brief denouement, Sally and Peter start to catch up and prepare for their reunion with Clarissa. Sally is disappointed with Clarissa just as Clarissa is disappointed with Sally.

Hugh walks by and Sally reaffirms her story that Hugh had once tried to kiss her in the smoking-room at Bourton. Sally wonders why Clarissa has never visited her in all these years, and she says that Clarissa is a bit of a snob. Soon afterward she feels a rush of affection for Clarissa though, and declares her pure of heart. She flaunts her sentimentality to Peter, saying that it is best to just say what one feels. Peter says he doesn't know what he feels.

Despite her conventional life situation, Sally shows that she still has her headstrong, passionate personality. Bourton starts to return even more strongly in the presence of these two characters. The clock has struck three in the morning, marking the forward march of time, but the past is still circling back to affect the present.

Peter tells Sally that his relationship with Clarissa had "spoilt his life," as he could not be in love like that twice. Sally says that she thinks Clarissa cared for Peter more than for Richard, but Peter stops her. They watch Elizabeth cross the room and think of how different she is from Clarissa. They can see the affection between Elizabeth and Richard, and Sally goes to say goodnight to Richard, admitting that he has "improved." Peter lingers, suddenly filled with terror and ecstasy, and then Clarissa appears.

Peter and Sally start to engage in some real communication now, as Sally decides to express her true sentiments Peter follows along, finally speaking his mind about Clarissa. The final reunion that has been pointed to throughout the book – the meeting between Peter, Sally, and Clarissa – takes place off the page, in the only place where true communion can exist. This offstage scene—which can't be depicted—begins with the sublime aspect of Clarissa's reality, as Peter is again struck by her simple existence. She has changed since her revelation about Septimus, and now is ready for an intimate, pure reunion with her old friends.



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