

- I began thinking about the classics after rereading Maureen Howard's foreword for the Harcourt edition of the novel. I thought a great way to begin discussing *Mrs. Dalloway* would be to look at the intertextual inspirations for the novel and how critics have related and reacted to this.
- The classics are fresh in Woolf's mind as she writes *Mrs. Dalloway* because she is also writing an essay on them for the first volume of her *Common Reader*, which primarily focuses on Sophocles. She is reading Sophocles and Euripides and also James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which had been published recently and which Woolf did not like much, writing "never did any book so bore me."
- Woolf essay about Arnold Bennett is also published about a month later.
- Besides the playful intertextual games I just so "love" Dr. Bluemel asked me to relate all of this to the questions of history she poses on the syllabus. We discussed the theme of journey a bit, but I think for *Mrs. Dalloway* the question surrounding what sort of "real" history do novels record is most useful. Much like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pym & Joseph Andrews* and *Pamela*, Woolf has many debts and influences: from both classic Greek theory and epic poetry and tragedy plus more contemporary writers like Proust and Joyce.
- According to Anna Benjamin in *Towards An Understanding Of The Meaning Of Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf "was able to find a way of expressing her view of reality and of presenting the complexities of the life of a human being in this reality"
- As Howard notes, Woolf begins with one simple scheme: A woman's day.
- There is one rule and only one rule: a June day in 1923, in London, morning until night.
- Throughout the day, various clocks in London signify the happenings. (SEE HANDOUTS) Jane Marcus refers to Big Ben as a "great masculine bully" in her essay *Thinking Back Through Our Mothers*
- In *Poetics*, Aristotle laid out the groundwork for the three main rules for drama: Unity of Time, Unity of Action, and Unity of Place.
- Unity of Action: While discussing tragedy in book 18 of *Poetics*, Aristotle writes:

Now, according to our definition, Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude ... As therefore, in the other imitative arts, the imitation is one when the object imitated is one, so the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole.

There is a structural unity surrounding the basic plot: Clarissa Dalloway "comes back alive" as Benjamin puts it over a June day in 1923. The striking of Big Ben and other clocks around London signify the time and measures the world around Clarissa.

- Unity of place: a play should cover a single physical space and should not attempt to compress geography, nor should the stage represent more than one place.
- Unity of time: the action in a play should take place over no more than 24 hours.
- Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude...Woolf imposes the life of a day for Clarissa in London; lunches, tea, and a dinner party "onto a chaotic

modern world in which pity and terror abound, and classic grief, but it is a world with no catharsis, no relief" (viii).

- As Alison Booth writes in *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot & Virginia Woolf*, Clarissa's "ordinary day is full of poetry and pathos, tragedy and comedy."
- Tea and parties try to quiet down and unify the chaos. But there is no catharsis in the Intermodern, between war, world.
- As articles such as Molly Hoff's 1999 *The Pseudo-Homeric World Of Mrs. Dalloway* argue, Woolf "paraphrases, parodies, and burlesques" a number of Greek texts. The primary text, as Hoff's title notes, that is intertextually used by Woolf is Homer, particularly his *Odyssey* but also the *Iliad*, Aristotle's *Poetics* and other classic Greek writing.
- Originally, and borrowed recently by Michael Cunningham for his own novel of the same name, *Mrs. Dalloway* was going to be called *The Hours*. As Hoff notes, this working title suggests Homer's *Odyssey*. The Latin word for Hour is "Hora," which comes from the Greek and can also mean very finite concepts like "spring" or a complete day.
- Homer's poem is a "revelation in hexameters of the moral, physical, social, and cosmic dimensions of timelessness." Odysseus' journey home takes 10 years, Clarissa's return to "life" takes a bit over 10 hours. Hoff also compares supporting characters to Helen Of Troy and Hector.
- There is a lot of debate as to the exact time....most argue 10 or 11, one Benjamin cites argues for 17!
- One of the most compelling things which *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Odyssey* share in the common is how they interact with time. Both narratives begin in the present, *in medias res*, in the middle of the story, but use flashbacks to engage with past. Another example of this from Greek antiquity is Aeschylus' tragedy *Agamemnon*, which chronicles his journey to Troy and back home, only to be murdered along with his lover Cassandra by his wife, unfolds in a similar non-linear fashion.
- According to Suzette A. Henke's essay *Mrs. Dalloway: The Communion Of Saints*, Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* is also referenced in Woolf's notes for *Mrs. Dalloway*
- But Hoff argues that it is not Clarissa who is the Odysseian character, but Peter Walsh.
- Much as the opening lines of the *Odyssey* where Athena notes that Odysseus is currently tangled up with Calypso, the return of Peter Walsh from India comes with the announcement via Lady Burton, who Hoff refers to as a "androgynous Athena" that he "is in trouble with some woman" (lines 12-15 in *Odyssey*)
- Back in India is Peter's Penelope, Daisy, who is courted by two men while he is gone and tricks both her suitors to stand aside.
- Septimus, the broken soldier in mourning, simulates Achilles when he has no taste for food. Achilles also denies himself sustenance in book nine to mourn his friend who have died in battle.
- Never fear, Clarissa has her own connection to the epics. Booth argues that Woolf believed women have access to a "secret form of heroism" related to epic life.
- Clarissa Dalloway is, Booth continues, a "living poem" who "influences moments of deeper communion because (she) is not a great man but many women to many people. (she) many even extend (her) spirit to the suffering common man, as Woolf speculates in linking *Mrs. Dalloway* and

Septimus Smith." Henke argues that Clarissa "embodies the feminine capacity to create, preserve, and sanctify life"

- Speaking of Septimus and Clarissa, according to Nancy Topping Bazin's book *Virginia Woolf & The Androgynous Vision*, Woolf is modifying a technique she got from Joseph Conrad of "representing in different characters the selves of which a total self might be composed." She discusses this in "*Mr. Conrad: A Conversation*"
- Bazin also argues that Clarissa and Septimus are also linked by Aristotle's unities of time, place, and action by outside influences like the motor car, the airplane, children, and the striking of Big Ben.