Bookreport Mrs. Dalloway

General information:

Title: Mrs. Dalloway

Writer: Virginia Woolf

Year of first publication: 1925

Publisher and read edition: Grafton Books, 1989

Summary:

The book tells the story of what happened on a summer day in the 1920’s. Clarissa Dalloway will be giving a party that night. She thinks during the book about her past, most specifically about Peter Walsh. This man was her lover but she married her current husband Richard Dalloway. At the same time, a man who has nothing to do with Clarissa, called Septimus Warren Smith, walks down the street with his wife Lucrezia. He is suffering from shell shock.

Peter Walsh drops in by Clarissa’s house and they have a conversation, but without warm feelings. Peter thinks about why Clarissa choose Richard and why Peter went to India. Peter leaves.

Meanwhile, Septimus and Lucrezia are walking in the park, Septimus is explaining why suicide is good. Lucrezia takes him to a doctor called Sir William Bradshaw, who says he has to be alone for a while.

Richard Dalloway buys flowers for his wife and has the intention to say he loves her, but he can’t. Meanwhile Lucrezia and Septimus are in there apartment, waiting for the man who will bring Septimus to retreat. He doesn’t want to go and jumps out of a window, he commits suicide.

Peter hears the ambulance carrying Septimus away. He decided to go to Clarissa’s party. Clarissa fears that her party won’t be a success, but it is. However, she feels dissatisfied. She hears from Bradshaw, also one of her guest, that he is late because one of his patients has committed suicide. Clarissa concludes that Septimus realized that man like Bradshaw make life intolerable. The party ends and Richard approaches to Clarissa. Peter founds out that he still loves Clarissa.

Analyse:

Setting: the book is set after World War I, in begin 1920’s. It plays in London for only one day, but it contains a lot of flashbacks.

Characters:

* Clarissa Dalloway: the main character in the book. She is a woman from about 50 years old, she lives in Westminster with her husband Richard Dalloway and her daughter Elizabeth. She enjoys life, but she is wondering if reaching happiness is possible. She loves to live in London. Clarissa is a caring woman, she concerns about people around her. She enjoys giving parties, she wants to be accepted in society. Clarissa belongs to the upper English class. Clarissa is a round character, you know a lot about her and why she does the things she does.
* Peter Walsh: Peter and Clarissa where in love in their younger days, but Clarissa married Richard Dalloway. Peter went to India, he married there a woman but he also divorces. He falls in love again, but he actually likes Clarissa more than that Indian girl. At the day of the book, he returns to London and decides to go to Clarissa’s party, although he hates parties. He finds out he still loves Clarissa. Peter is a round characters, in the beginning of the book you find him maybe a strange man, but in his flashbacks it becomes clearer why he is as he is.
* Septimus Warren Smith: Septimus is a war veteran suffering from shell shock. He talks to his dead friend Evans, whom he met in war. Septimus was before the war a writer and poet and has joined the war for romantic reasons. He is married to a Italian woman, Lucrezia. Septimus is depressed and commits suicide by jumping out of the window. Septimus is a round character, during the book you get to know why he is depressed.
* Richard Dalloway: Clarissa’s husband, a member of the parliament. He still loves his wife, but he hasn’t said for a long time that he loves her. So when he wants to say that to Clarissa, he can’t. Other characters think that Richard would be much happier in the country instead of busy London.
* Sally Seton/ Lady Rosseter: when they were young, Clarissa and Sally where best friends. Sally is known for being rebelish, like running naked down the stairs. She has surprisingly married a wealthy man and has five sons, but she has still some of her outrageous ideas. Sally is a flat character, you don’t know a lot about her
* Lucrezia Warren Smith: Septimus wife. She lived in Italy making hats with her sisters before she married Septimus. She loves him, but wants a normal marriage with a normal husband, not a depressed man talking to the death. She tries to protect her husband from doctors, but she cannot. She is a flat character.
* Sir William Bradshaw: a doctor who treats Septimus. He recognises shell shock and insist on Septimus being on retreat. Septimus hates him because he represents humanity, Rezia because he wants to separate her and her husband, and Clarissa hates him because he makes the live of his patients intolerable.

Point of view: the book is written in third person omniscient. The narrator knows everything about the characters. The point of view changes during the book. The omniscient narrator is anonymous. With this point of view, the reader can understand really well what happens in the minds of the characters and as a reader you also get to know more than the character because characters think about the other characters, for example: you get to know what Peter thinks of Clarissa and what Clarissa thinks of Peter.

Title explanation: Mrs. Dalloway refers to the main character of the book. Mrs. refers to that Clarissa has chosen Richard and that choosing him has a big influence on her current life.

Theme: one of the themes in Mrs. Dalloway is society and class, and the struggles with it. Clarissa belongs to de upper class of England, the most important and powerful one. She believes that the best thing she can do for society is giving a good party. Most of Clarissa’s friends are in the same upper class. Other characters are in a lower class and they actually don’t like the upper class (like Miss Killman).

Another theme is suffering (physically , emotionally or mentally) . Septimus is suffering from delayed shell shock caused by World War I in which he saw his friend die. Also Clarissa is suffering, and Peter because of the past.

The last important theme is memories and the past. Although the book covers only 1 day, you know a lot about what happened in the past because the characters think about their memories. Some of them are good ones, Clarissa has more good ones than bad. Peter can’t stop thinking about Clarissa and why she rejected him. Septimus is obviously suffering from his past, his memories drive him crazy.

Personal reaction:

When I started reading, I had a real struggle to read on and to understand what happened. The book is very confusing, with the past and the present weaved together and because there are a lot of point of views changings. Also, it isn’t a very exciting book, because everything happens in one day and the characters think of their past. That made it hard to read for me. In the end, it went better and I understood more. I am not sure if I would suggest this book to my classmates. I think the story is a good one, but you have to think a lot about it and I had to search on internet for information, because I didn’t understand the book completely. Because this book isn’t so easy, I wouldn’t recommend it if the reader doesn’t like reading or doesn’t have so much time to read. But if the reader has time, likes a book without action and is quite smart, Mrs. Dalloway is a nice book to read.