



Mr. Dalloway: A Novella

By Robin Lippincott

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A virtuoso performance of postmodern daring, *Mr. Dalloway* offers a rich augmentation of Virginia Woolf's classic novel.

It is June 29, 1927—Richard and Clarissa Dalloway's thirtieth anniversary and also a day of historical significance. Richard has arranged a surprise party for his wife. As he leaves their house in Westminster to buy flowers for the party, his thoughts turn to Robert Davies (Robbie), a young editor at Faber with whom he has been having an affair off and on for many years. Because of Richard's efforts to contain their relationship, Robbie has exposed their affair in a letter to Clarissa, who tells her husband that she "understands." And today Richard, despite his misgivings, finds himself on his way to Robbie's house—only to be shaken by the discovery that Robbie is not there.

As does the Woolf novel, *Mr. Dalloway* takes place within a single day, unfolding prismatically with a simultaneity of events: Clarissa walks in London and remembers her courtship with Richard; their daughter Elizabeth searches for answers about her eccentric history tutor's somewhat mysterious and premature death; and a determined and drunken Robert Davies has decided to crash Richard's party, dressed all in white satin, no less! As the novella moves toward its surprising climax, it revisits several of Woolf's celebrated characters—Sally Seton (now Lady Rosseter), Hugh Whitbread, Lady Bruton—while introducing new ones, such as the Sapphist couple Katherine Truelock and Eleanor Gibson, and the strange and beautiful Sasha Richardson.

Imaginative and formally bold as it refracts Woolf's fiction to invent a story completely Lippincott's own, *Mr. Dalloway* rides forward on waves of a masterfully complex and musical prose, full of wit, linguistic verve, and startling imagery.

Robin Lippincott is the author of *The Real, True Angel*, a collection of short stories published in 1996 by Fleur-de-Lis Press. His fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The American Voice*, *The Literary Review*, *Provincetown Arts*, and many other magazines; he was awarded fellowships to Yaddo in 1997 and 1998. Born and raised in the South, he has lived in Boston for twenty years. He is curren

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Lippincott calls his first novel a "creative response" to the Virginia Woolf classic of similar title, but its virtuoso handling of the inner life of its characters should delight more than just Woolf enthusiasts. Like Mrs. Dalloway, this book confines its action to a single day in London and its environs, drifting among the members of the Dalloway house as they prepare a party for the Dalloways' 30th wedding anniversary. Here, however, the primary focus is on Richard Dalloway, former Parliament member, doting husband, a man trying desperately to manage an affair that threatens his family on several levels. Richard's social class puts him at ease in his world, but can't prevent him from suffering a quiet desperation; he's a man whose confidence seems to ride on his last exchange with a bookstore clerk or a flower peddler. As he oversees the party arrangements, Clarissa, Richard's wife, likewise contemplates their lengthy marriage. Expertly manipulating point of view, Lippincott (*The Real, True Angel*) also enables the reader to view the Dalloways through several eyes: their daughter, Elizabeth; Richard's lover, Robbie; even the servants who loyally attend the Dalloways but offer their own perspective on the life of upper-class England. By using recognizably Woolfian techniques—shifting points of view, extensive inner monologue—the author pays homage to Woolf while at the same time creating his own vision of a straitjacketed, homophobic England. Only the references to Woolf herself, including one in-person appearance, seem a bit cute in a book in which much else is understated. This is imitation in its finest form, as one writer draws from another to create a convincing world. (July)

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From [Booklist](#)

Three years have passed since Clarissa Dalloway hosted her famously lovely party in London. Richard Dalloway has retired from public life. Elizabeth, their daughter, studies veterinary science in Liverpool. Richard's long-ago rival, Peter Walsh, remains in India with his new wife. Now it's Richard's turn to throw a party. It's 28 June_ 1927, and the occasion is Richard and Clarissa's thirtieth wedding anniversary. All the details, including the flowers, are Richard's responsibility. The venue is Richard's secret; guests will be transported by rail. Richard excels at keeping secrets, not the least of which is Robert Davies, his lover of 10 years who drunkenly decides to attend the party as a surprise. Like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, this novel traces a single day: the shops and sidewalks, faces in the park, unexpected visitors. Anticipation propels the reader forward, just as the train carries Richard's guests through the dark. Lippincott is faithful to the interior voices, rhythms, and themes of the original, yet his exploration is fresh and revealing. A playful and worthy companion to both *Mrs. Dalloway* and Michael Cunningham's recent, Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Hours*. James Klise

From Kirkus Reviews

paper 1-889330-29-9 Another in the imitation-of-the-greats genre, this time turning on the narrow premise that Mr. Clarissa Dalloway was gay. (Lippincott wrote *The Real, True Angel*, stories, not reviewed.) For a decade, Richard Dalloway, aged 55 and retired from Parliament, has been carrying on an affair with one Robert Davies, ten years his junior and as enamored of Richard as Richard is of him. Clarissa herself, when Richard confessed to her the nature of what was going on, informed him with classic tolerance that she understood and that seemed to have been that. And yet Richards secret torture still wont go away as he suffers ploddingly between the torment of desire and the awful terror of discovery. Like Mrs. Dalloway in her book, Mr. Dalloway walks through the park, buys flowers, thinks about the past, plans a party for the Dalloways 30th anniversary. His and others thoughts are portrayed amid small blizzards of parentheses (and shouldnt they be?) far in excess (one cant help but feel) of any Woolfian measure, while a craven imitativeness in

style, however skilled, seems designed as much to fill stage-time as to advance or reveal (Woolf's towering purpose) things (Oh, it is cruel, Richard Dalloway thought life, time: cruel). Waiting (and waiting) for the party to begin, explorations are made into the causes of the same-sex love in Robbie and Richard Robbins' wonderful relation with his now-absent father, Richards' hideous relation with his not to mention Richards' unbounded love for his younger brother Duncan, who in his early teens, however, bowed tragically out of life altogether (There. There it was. There he was a white, bloodless Duncan, hanging...from one of the rafters. No! Richard turned away. It couldn't be! No! It wasn't possible . . .). A first novel that's often elegant (to a fault, one quickly adds) in imitation of surface and style but that gravely misconstrues its high model by bending it to lesser and unoriginal aims. -- *Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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