

文学作品辅导丛书

YORK NOTES ON

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

到灯塔去

Virginia Woolf

LONGMAN
LITERATURE
GUIDES

YORK NOTES

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Virginia Woolf

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

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LONGMAN
YORK PRESS



世界图书出版公司

北京·广州·上海·西安

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This edition of York Notes on
To the Lighthouse
is Published by arrangement
with Addison Wesley Longman
Limited, London. 1997
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约克文学作品辅导丛书: 到灯塔去(沃尔夫)

E· 格罗夫 - 怀特 著

英国朗文出版公司出版
世界图书出版公司北京公司重印
北京朝阳门内大街 137 号 邮编: 100010
北京中西印刷厂印刷
世界图书出版公司北京公司发行
各地新华书店和外文书店经销

*

1998 年 1 月第 1 版 开本: 850×1168 1/32
1998 年 1 月第 1 次印刷 印张: 2.5
印数: 0001-2000 字数: 65 千字

ISBN: 7-5062-3351-7/I· 28

著作权合同登记 图字: 01-97-0681 号

定价: 4.70 元

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《约克文学作品辅导丛书》介绍

《约克文学作品辅导丛书》(York Notes)系 Longman 集团有限公司(英国)出版。本丛书覆盖了世界各国历代文学名著,原意是辅导英国中学生准备文学课的高级会考或供英国大学生自学参考。因此,它很适合我国高校英语专业学生研读文学作品时参考。

丛书由 A. N. Jeffares 和 S. Bushrui 两位教授任总编。每册的编写者大都是研究有关作家的专家学者,他们又都有在大学讲授文学的经验,比较了解学生理解上的难点。本丛书自问世以来,始终畅销不衰,被使用者普遍认为是英美出版的同类书中质量较高的一种。

丛书每一册都按统一格式对一部作品进行介绍和分析。每一册都有下列五个部分。

① 导言。主要介绍:作者生平,作品产生的社会、历史背景,有关的文学传统或文艺思潮等。

② 内容提要。一般分为两部分:a. 全书的内容概述;b. 每章的内容提要及难词、难句注释,如方言、典故、圣经或文学作品的引语、有关社会文化习俗等。注释恰到好处,对于读懂原作很有帮助。

③ 评论。结合作品的特点,对结构、人物塑造、叙述角度、语言风格、主题思想等进行分析和评论。论述深入浅出,分析力求客观,意在挖掘作品内涵和展示其艺术性。

④ 学习提示。提出学习要点、重要引语和思考题(附参考答案或答案要点)。

⑤ 进一步研读指导。介绍该作品的最佳版本;版本中是否有重大改动;列出供进一步研读的参考书目(包括作者传记、研究有关作品的专著和评论文章等)。

总之,丛书既提供必要的背景知识,又注意启发学生思考;既重视在吃透作品的基础上进行分析,又对进一步研究提供具体指导;因此是一套理想的英语文学辅导材料。

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钱 瑗

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Part 1

Introduction

Biographical note

Virginia Woolf was born in London in 1882, youngest daughter of the large and talented Stephen family. Her father, Leslie Stephen, was a distinguished critic, biographer and philosopher, and one of the most influential figures in the literary world of late Victorian England. Among his most famous works are the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. His first wife was a daughter of the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, who died after eight years of marriage leaving him with *one daughter*. His *second* wife was Mrs Julia Prinsep Jackson Duckworth, the beautiful widow of a barrister friend, who, in addition to having three children from her first marriage, bore Leslie Stephen four children: Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia and Adrian.

The Stephen family belonged to the upper-middle class which produced most of the influential thinkers and artists of the day. They frequently entertained the greatest writers and political figures of the time, who were attracted to their Hyde Park house by Leslie Stephen's reputation and by his wife's famous beauty. While still a young man, Stephen had abandoned a promising future as a Cambridge don because of his growing religious agnosticism; and this characteristic of intellectual and moral integrity was to become evident in his children, particularly Virginia. His extensive library was open to the children, and in later life Virginia recounted with gratitude how she had worked her way through this library and become acquainted with an unusually large number of English and classical works. For the first thirteen years of her life Virginia and the rest of the Stephen family spent their summer holidays in a house rented for the purpose in St Ives in Cornwall, and the rugged beauty of this coastal setting seems to have haunted her adult imagination, reappearing in various guises in most of her novels. Although *To the Lighthouse* is set in Scotland, the atmosphere and detail of the Ramsay household owe much to her early, happy memories of St Ives.

The tranquillity of these early childhood days was shattered, however, by the sudden death of Virginia's mother in 1895 – an event that heralded a particularly bleak time in Virginia's life. She suffered a period of insanity after her mother's death and had scarcely recovered

when her beloved half-sister, Stella Duckworth, died unexpectedly. These deaths plunged Leslie Stephen into an orgy of gloom, a gloom that clouded the existence of those who lived with him and persisted until his death in 1904, following a lengthy and painful illness.

After their father's death, the Stephen children moved to Bloomsbury and it was in a house in Gordon Square that Virginia Stephen made her first serious attempts at writing. While the bohemian ways of these financially-independent Stephen children shocked some older family friends such as the novelist Henry James, they quickly formed the nucleus of a brilliant young group of Cambridge graduates. In this socially casual but intellectually stimulating environment, Virginia pursued her literary interests, becoming a regular reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, reading widely, beginning work on her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, and travelling abroad. Once more, however, her life was interrupted by sudden death, this time the death of her older brother Thoby, who died of typhoid on a trip to Greece in 1905.

In 1912 Virginia married Leonard Woolf, one of Thoby's Cambridge friends, who had served seven years in the Ceylon Civil Service and returned to England, critical of British politics and colonial policy. The marriage proved an extremely happy one. Leonard recognised his wife's extraordinary talents from the beginning and provided her with the encouragement and protection she needed to fulfil her literary promise. Leonard himself was a talented and versatile writer, and his work ranged from complex political tracts to novels and short stories.

Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1915 and received encouraging reviews. Emboldened by this success, she soon began work on a second novel and continued to review books for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Although her work was interrupted by periods of physical and mental illness, she managed in her lifetime to produce nine novels, a number of short stories, and countless essays, reviews and pamphlets.

She was part of a group of people, now known collectively as the 'Bloomsbury Group', although it is doubtful if the members of that group would agree with their current depiction as a unified, homogenous circle. Early friends, mostly people who had been to Cambridge with her brother Thoby, included Lytton Strachey the historian, Maynard Keynes the economist, Clive Bell who was her brother-in-law and a celebrated art historian, E.M. Forster the novelist, and Roger Fry the artist and critic. This circle constantly expanded to include new friends, amongst whom are numbered T.S. Eliot, Katherine Mansfield, Elizabeth Bowen, Vita Sackville-West and her husband Sir Harold Nicholson. From Virginia Woolf's diaries and letters, as well as from the contemporary accounts of her friends and

acquaintances, we know that she loved the company of others and was particularly devoted to children, especially to her sister Vanessa's sons and daughter.

In 1917 she and her husband founded the Hogarth Press, which developed from a small, second-hand printing press in their basement into one of the most successful and innovative publishing houses of its time. In addition to her literary interests, Virginia Woolf throughout her life was actively interested in the feminist question and two major essays, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, testify to her commitment. Although never as active as her husband in the politics of the British Labour party, she frequently accompanied him to political conferences and seems to have shared many of his political attitudes.

Her tragic suicide, in March 1941, came as a shock to her friends and family. She had just completed a first draft of *Between the Acts*, and the period following the completion of a novel was usually a time of deep depression for her. Added to her dissatisfaction with the novel was the terrible strain of the war; her London home had been destroyed by bombs and even the peace of the Sussex countryside where she lived was frequently disturbed by bombings and dogfights between the Royal Air Force and the German Luftwaffe. One morning in late March, she left home on her customary daily walk, filled the pockets of her coat with stones and drowned herself in the River Ouse.

The genesis of *To the Lighthouse*

The details of Virginia Woolf's biography are of more than usual interest when we come to a discussion of *To the Lighthouse*, for this novel, both in conception and execution, has extraordinarily close connections with Virginia Woolf's personal experience. Indeed, the very first reference to the novel in her diary makes this relationship quite clear:

I'm now all on the strain with desire to stop journalism and get on to *To the Lighthouse*. This is going to be fairly short; to have father's character done complete in it; and mother's; and St Ives; and childhood; and all the usual things I try to put in – life, death, etc. But the centre is father's character, sitting in a boat, reciting *We perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel*.¹

While the ties between a novelist's life and the world of her novels are complex and difficult to unravel, Virginia Woolf's biographical materials indicate unambiguously the closeness between the world of *To the Lighthouse* and her early childhood memories. When Vanessa,

¹Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, ed. Leonard Woolf, Hogarth Press, London, 1953, pp.76–7.

her sister, first read *To the Lighthouse*, she wrote to her:

Anyhow it seemed to me that in the first part of the book you have given a portrait of mother which is more like her to me than anything I could ever have conceived of as possible. It is almost painful to have her so raised from the dead. You have made one feel the extraordinary beauty of her character, which must be the most difficult thing in the world to do. It was like meeting her again with oneself grown up and on equal terms and it seems to me the most astonishing feat of creation to have been able to see her in such a way. You have given father too I think as clearly but perhaps, I may be wrong, that isn't quite so difficult. There is more to catch hold of. Still it seems to me to be the only thing about him which ever gave a true idea. So you see as far as portrait painting goes you seem to me to be a supreme artist and it is so shattering to find oneself face to face with those two again that I can hardly consider anything else.²

We know from Virginia's reply³ that she was delighted with this response but during that same month she wrote to two friends, Roger Fry⁴ and Violet Dickinson⁵, cautioning them against too literal an interpretation of the novel.

Without falling into this trap, it is useful to have some knowledge of the apparent similarities between the Ramsay family of *To the Lighthouse* and the Stephen family of Virginia Woolf's childhood. Like Leslie Stephen, Mr Ramsay is an eminent philosopher and man of letters who attracts a circle of friends and disciples. Again like Leslie Stephen, Mr Ramsay has a disconcerting habit of speaking aloud to himself and was, in his youth, an enthusiastic walker and mountaineer. The intellectual integrity of Mr Ramsay finds an echo in Leslie Stephen, as does Mr Ramsay's abruptness and impatience with lesser intellects.

Mr and Mrs Ramsay, like Leslie and Julia Stephen, are a happily-married couple, and their mutual love endures through the stresses of life with a large family. The beautiful, maternal Mrs Ramsay appears to correspond to Julia Stephen, who frequently sat for portraits and photographs by the most eminent artists of her day. From Noel Annan's biography of Sir Leslie Stephen⁶ we know that Mrs Stephen had a need to surround herself with dependent people and Leslie Stephen fulfilled this need, relying upon her heavily to fill his own needs, real and imagined. This moral ambivalence is part of Mrs Ramsay's character

²Virginia Woolf, *A Change of Perspective: the Letters of Virginia Woolf 1923-1928*, ed. Nigel Nicolson, Hogarth Press, London, 1977, p.572.

³*ibid.*, p.379.

⁴*ibid.*, p.385.

⁵*ibid.*, p.389.

⁶See Noel Gilroy Annan, *Leslie Stephen: His Thought and Character in Relation to his Time*, MacGibbon and Kee, London, 1952.

in the novel, and Virginia Woolf depicts in her a woman whose maternal impulses lead to the creation of an atmosphere of warmth and creativity, while rashly interfering in the lives of others.

The setting of the novel, ostensibly the Hebrides, is clearly based on the Cornwall of Virginia Woolf's early childhood. While revising *To the Lighthouse* for publication, she revisited St Ives with her husband, and wrote to a friend: 'We look down into the heart of the Atlantic from our bedroom. All my facts about Lighthouses are wrong.'⁷

There are several obvious parallels between the Stephen family history and the incidents which threaten to overwhelm their fictional counterparts. Mrs Ramsay's untimely death corresponds to what is known of Mrs Stephen's death; Prue Ramsay's death in childbirth obviously echoes Stella Duckworth's death, at twenty-eight, three months after her wedding; Andrew's death in battle reflects the death from typhoid of Virginia Woolf's much-loved brother, Thoby.

A year after publication of *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary:

Father's birthday. He would have been 96, 96, yes, today; and could have been 96, like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; – inconceivable.

I used to think of him and mother daily; but writing the *Lighthouse* laid them in my mind. And now he comes back sometimes, but differently. (I believe this to be true – that I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily; and writing of them was a necessary act.)⁸

Clearly, the writing of *To the Lighthouse* sprang from an intense psychological need, but this novel is not simply of biographical interest. Through her extraordinary craftsmanship and vision, Virginia Woolf has transformed the materials of private, childhood memory into an artistic entity which can stand on its own, independent of explanation or annotation.

A note on the text

To the Lighthouse was first published by the Hogarth Press, London, on 5 May 1927. One of the most consistently successful of Virginia Woolf's novels, it has been translated into many languages and has gone into numerous editions. The page references which follow are to the Triad/Panther Books edition, St Albans, London, 1977.

⁷ *A Change of Perspective: the Letters of Virginia Woolf 1923–1928*, p.310.

⁸ *A Writer's Diary*, p.138.

Part 2

Summaries

of TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

A general summary

Even before she had set a single word of *To the Lighthouse* on paper, Virginia Woolf had a clear idea of the structure, content, theme and even the title of the novel, commenting in her diary:

The word 'sentimental' sticks in my gizzard . . .

But this theme may be sentimental; father and mother and child in the garden; the death; the sail to the Lighthouse. I think, though, that when I begin it I shall enrich it in all sorts of ways; thicken it; give it branches – roots which I do not perceive now. It might contain all characters boiled down; and childhood; and then this impersonal thing, which I'm dared to do by my friends, the flight of time and the consequent break of unity in my design. That passage (I conceive the book in 3 parts. 1. at the drawing room window; 2. seven years passed; 3. the voyage) interests me very much.¹

The final version of the novel was indeed divided as she had envisaged: Part I, The Window; Part II, Time Passes; Part III, The Lighthouse.

In Part I of the novel, 'The Window', we are introduced to the Ramsay family and friends, holidaying for the summer on a remote and unparticularised Hebridean island. The action in this section takes place during a late September afternoon and evening. As well as introducing the main characters and symbols of the novel, this section presents the central narrative issue of the novel: whether or not an expedition to the local lighthouse will take place on the following day.

The second part of the novel, 'Time Passes', is a poetic, impressionistic depiction of the changes which befall the house and its inhabitants over a period of ten years. The war prevents the Ramsays from returning to the house and it falls to the mercy of natural forces, of weather, of the seasons, of night and day, of time itself. We learn from parenthetical statements scattered through the description of the house's disintegration that Mrs Ramsay has died, Andrew has been killed in the war, and Prue has died in childbirth. Towards the end of this section, however, the comic figure of Mrs McNab, the old woman who cleans the house, returns to the house to restore order in anticipation of a return visit by the Ramsays. The passage of time is presented

¹A *Writer's Diary*, pp.80–1.

through the unfolding of key images rather than through the more orthodox method of chronological development, and this whole central section represents a technical *tour de force* by Virginia Woolf.

The third and final section of *To the Lighthouse*, 'The Lighthouse', depicts the return visit to the house by the remaining Ramsays and their long-delayed expedition to the lighthouse. Certain guests return with them, and the novel closes with the artistic triumph of Lily Briscoe, a visitor on the earlier occasion also. While Mr Ramsay and two of the children make their way to the lighthouse, Lily resumes work on a painting interrupted ten years earlier and as she does so, she has a fleeting vision which seems to bring into perspective the significance of past and present. The arrival of the Ramsays at the lighthouse coincides with the completion of Lily's picture, and each event adds a depth of symbolic meaning to the other, bringing all levels of the novel to a satisfying conclusion.

Detailed summaries

Part I, Section 1

This first section of the novel sets the scene for the book and introduces us to two of the main characters, Mr and Mrs Ramsay.

Mrs Ramsay sits with her young son James and knits a stocking for the son of the lighthouse keeper in anticipation of a visit to the lighthouse which the family has planned for the following day. Mr Ramsay intrudes upon this tranquil scene, pointing out that the weather is about to change and the forthcoming trip must be postponed. Despite Mrs Ramsay's attempts to placate James, Mr Ramsay continues to insist that they will be unable to visit the lighthouse, and he is joined by the unpleasant Mr Tansley, a guest and disciple of Mr Ramsay, who, to Mrs Ramsay's annoyance, takes his host's part in the argument. Despite her dislike of Tansley, Mrs Ramsay has an instinctive reverence for men and a strong desire to protect them, and is consequently disturbed by the hostile attitude to Tansley shown by her children, particularly her daughters. To compensate, she has made special efforts to be kind to him, inviting him to join her on an errand to the nearby town, in the course of which he has been captivated by her charm and beauty and has confided in her the pain of his past life and his hopes for the future.

In this opening section, Mrs Ramsay is established as a major narrative and symbolic centre in the novel. She is seated at the window, the link between the house and outdoors. It is to her that Mr Ramsay and Charles Tansley come. Her point of view is the dominant one, and

we see the present and the past largely through her eyes. The two opening statements of the section establish two worlds of value in this novel: we see how Mrs Ramsay's desire to please her children blinds her to the threat of bad weather; and we see also her husband's rigorous, unswerving, but unsympathetic devotion to factual truth. While this first section is concerned with mundane events in a recognisable world (the trip to the lighthouse, Mrs Ramsay's knitting, the visit to the local town, the chitchat of everyday life) we are made aware of another reality beneath that surface, the reality experienced inwardly by the various characters as they go about their business in the world.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

clan:	family
ermine:	a small animal, whose fur is used to decorate the robes of the nobility
on the Bench:	an expression referring to a judge
odious:	hateful
Hebrides:	a group of remote islands off the coast of Scotland
admonished:	warned
Isle of Skye:	an island off the west coast of Scotland
Balliol:	a famous Oxford college
prolegomena:	preliminary remarks or dissertation
parasol:	small sun umbrella
somnolence:	drowsiness, sleepiness
lethargy:	apathetic state
Panama hat:	a light straw hat with a wide brim
Garter:	the highest order of British knighthood

Part I, Section 2

To Mrs Ramsay's annoyance, Tansley repeats his prediction that there will be no trip to the lighthouse on the following day. Ironically, Tansley has been trying to make this opinion more palatable in deference to Mrs Ramsay.

Part I, Section 3

Mrs Ramsay attempts to soothe young James's disappointment and helps him find suitable pictures in an old catalogue for his scrapbook. As she does so, she is partially aware of the reassuring sound of the waves in the distance, but as she becomes more aware of them, it seems to her that they have an ominous sound, warning of death and disintegration. She realises that her feeling of apprehension has been

caused by the sudden silence of the people outside the house, a silence broken by the sound of her husband's voice declaiming Tennyson's poem 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. The only other guest who can hear him is Lily Briscoe, standing at the edge of the lawn, painting.

NOTES AND GLOSSARY:

caustic: a substance that burns or corrodes

ephemeral: short-lived

'Stormed at with shot and shell': from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's (1809–92) poem, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'

Part I, Section 4

As she paints, Lily is indeed aware of Mr Ramsay's recitation and, although embarrassed by his habit of reciting poetry aloud to himself, is relieved that he has not come to inspect her painting. She is joined by Mr Banks, an old friend of Ramsay who, like Lily, is lodging in the nearby village. He invites her to join him in a stroll and as they take their customary walk around the garden, Mr Banks thinks of Lily as a physically plain but sensible young woman, while Lily wonders why her paint-brush cannot capture the reality which her eyes see, and asks herself if it is possible ever to express fully the interior vision. They move through the garden, noticing that the air is getting cooler and together they gaze at the familiar seascape. Banks is reminded of a younger Ramsay on a walking tour in Westmorland, admiring a hen and her chicks, and reflects on how their friendship has changed over the years, largely, Banks feels, because of Mr Ramsay's domestic preoccupations. The sight of the hen and her chicks had been strangely prophetic and marked the end of their intimate friendship. He thinks of the numerous Ramsay children and the family's financial responsibilities and realises that, despite his sympathy for his friend, he also envies Ramsay his children. Lily reminds him about Ramsay's work and tries to imagine the nature of his philosophical work. She sees it as a scrubbed kitchen table lodged in a pear tree. Banks continues to discuss Ramsay's achievements and as he does so, Lily mentally compares him to Ramsay, admiring his objectivity and his single-mindedness at the expense of their host. Even as she does so, however, she becomes aware of the complexity of Ramsay's character and his many praiseworthy qualities. Her train of thought is shattered by the sound of Jasper Ramsay's gun, shooting at a flock of starlings, and by the sudden appearance of Ramsay himself, who continues to recite his poetry.

In this section, the angle of vision has shifted from Mrs Ramsay at