

约克文学作品辅导丛书

YORK NOTES ON

# MRS DALLOWAY

达罗卫夫人

Virginia Woolf



LONGMAN  
LITERATURE  
GUIDES

# YORK NOTES

*General Editors: Professor A.N. Jeffares (University  
of Stirling) & Professor Suheil Bushrui (American  
University of Beirut)*

Virginia Woolf

## MRS DALLOWAY

*Notes by John Mepham*

BA (OXON)



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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。

北京师范大学外文系教授 钱 瑗



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# Introduction

## The author's life and works

Virginia Woolf was born in 1882. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen, was a prominent Victorian intellectual who wrote books on history, biography and philosophy, but whose most lasting accomplishment was the huge sixty-three volume *Dictionary of National Biography* which he edited and to which he was the most prolific contributor for very many years. The large Stephen family lived in a house near Hyde Park in London. They were a comfortable, upper-middle-class family with social connections both with artists and writers (including the novelists Thackeray and Henry James) and with the social elite of judges, politicians and aristocracy.

As was normal at that time Virginia, as a girl, received no formal education. While her brothers were sent off to expensive schools and later to Cambridge University, she and her sister Vanessa had to make do with an informal education at home. Her sister, with whom she was exceptionally close all her life, became a well-known painter, one of a group through whom modern styles of painting were introduced into England. As for Virginia, her father encouraged her to read widely. She used his extensive library and decided when she was still a young girl that she wanted to follow her father and become a writer.

Virginia Stephen's life was deeply marked by a number of deaths in her family. Her much-loved mother died when Virginia was only thirteen years old. Her death destroyed for ever the secure, cheerful family life which Virginia had enjoyed until then. Her half-sister, Stella Duckworth, took over her mother's place in running the household but just two years later, when she had been married for only two months, she too suddenly died. Leslie Stephen died in 1904 after a long and painful illness through which he was nursed by Virginia. Two years later her brother Thoby, of whom she was very fond, suddenly died of typhoid fever which he caught while travelling in Greece. Virginia was still only twenty-four years old.

These deaths left Virginia Stephen badly shaken and deeply distressed. Her diaries show that she was obsessed with the memory of her dead parents for a very long time until, when she was in her mid-forties, she wrote a portrait of them and their marriage in her novel *To the Lighthouse*. After her mother's death Virginia's mental health



deteriorated. She suffered her first serious breakdown in 1895 and her second after her father's death in 1904. At that time she was seriously incapacitated for many months. She suffered hallucinations and attempted to kill herself by throwing herself from a window. In 1910 and again in 1912 she was forced to spend some time in a private rest home. In 1913 she was again severely ill for many months and again attempted suicide. Her breakdowns became less severe after 1916, but for the rest of her life she was always liable to suffer from grave depression, nervous tension and physical illness. The madness of Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* and his treatment at the hands of the doctors are closely based on Virginia Woolf's own experiences.

After their father's death the Stephen sisters set up home in Bloomsbury, a less fashionable district of London than the one in which they had previously lived. It is a district which, containing the University of London and the British Museum, is more associated with intellectual life and less with the luxurious living of the aristocracy. Their home became a meeting place for their brothers' friends from the University of Cambridge and there was formed what became known as the 'Bloomsbury Group'. This group of friends represented much of what was most modern both in their rejection of the oppressive taboos of Victorian moral and sexual life and in their cultural and intellectual interests and achievements. The Post-Impressionist paintings of the French artists Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) and Henri Matisse (1869–1954) were introduced to England by one of the group, the influential art critic and painter Roger Fry (1866–1934). Others read and translated into English the works of the Viennese founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), and trained as psychoanalysts. In literature, the novelist E.M. Forster (1879–1970) and the poet T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) were associated with the group. Virginia Woolf was to become its most celebrated writer of fiction. A revolution in economic theory was to be accomplished by another member, John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946). The Bloomsbury Group was influential in English intellectual life for very many years.

In 1912 Virginia Stephen married Leonard Woolf (1880–1969), a young man who had been among her brother's friends at Cambridge. Unlike most of their circle he had to work for a living and he started a career in the colonial service as an administrator in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). He gave up this career to marry Virginia Stephen and became an independent intellectual, a professional editor, writer and publisher (Leonard and Virginia Woolf founded the Hogarth Press in 1917 and it became an influential publishing house as well as a successful business). Leonard Woolf was active in the Labour Party and was involved in the campaign for the independence of India. Unlike many of the other members of the Stephen circle, he was a commonsensical,

practical man who viewed the dominant culture with extreme scepticism and whose intellectual interests were more political than aesthetic. He recognised his wife's greatness as a writer and provided for her affectionate and admiring encouragement and support. They settled down to a reasonably comfortable life—Virginia having a private income. They had a home in London and later also a second home in the country. They employed servants. They ran their successful publishing business together. Their lives were a combination of hard work and the amusements of the wealthy. Virginia led a very active social life and cultivated relations with aristocratic women. Parties, like that given by Clarissa Dalloway, were very much part of her life. On medical advice, the Woolfs had no children.

Virginia Woolf is generally regarded as one of the finest English novelists. Her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1915, but it was not until her third novel (*Jacob's Room*, published in 1922) that she began to write in her characteristically modernist narrative style, rejecting traditional forms of character and plot. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) is in this line of development as are her famous later novels *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *The Waves* (1931) and *Between the Acts* (1941). She was a prolific writer. She published not only novels but also some very fine polemical feminist books (*A Room of One's Own*, 1929, and *Three Guineas*, 1938), books of literary essays (for example, *The Common Reader*, 1925, and *The Second Common Reader*, 1932). Many readers regard some of her writing that has only been published since her death as her finest, especially the autobiographical sketches in *Moments of Being* and her five-volume *Diary*.

Virginia Woolf died in 1941. Depressed and frightened by the thought that she was again on the verge of madness, she put rocks into the pockets of her coat and drowned herself in a river which ran near her home.

## Historical background

The period of Virginia Woolf's early life was one of profound social and cultural change. She was born into the Victorian world, and came to maturity as an author in the modern world. In the Victorian world, certain central and unquestioned beliefs and values underpinned much of social and political life, beliefs and values which are summed up in words such as 'empire', 'civilisation', 'progress' and 'duty'. A particular way of understanding history accompanied these concepts and this way is mocked throughout *Mrs Dalloway*. For example, in the late Victorian world it could still seem totally natural that huge areas of the earth should be ruled from Britain. The British Empire was assumed to have a civilising and progressive mission. By the early 1920s, agitation

for independence for India, the most glorious of imperial possessions, was well under way. In progressive circles, such as the Labour Party in which the Woolfs were active, the British Empire was now seen not as a natural phenomenon destined to last for ever, but as a transient historical phenomenon which was already showing signs of nearing the end of its life.

Part of the justification for imperial rule was the assumption of cultural superiority on the part of the British ruling class, and this was based on the belief that European political institutions and processes were rational and civilised. These beliefs were very severely shattered by the experience of the First World War of 1914–18. The Great War, as it was called, was seen by many as a demonstration not of advanced and superior European civilisation but of the most primitive and destructive forces of aggression and irrational hatred, as well as of gross political and military incompetence and official callousness and cruelty. Millions of soldiers died in the trenches for no rational cause. Freud, for example, in a correspondence with the greatest scientist of the modern age, Albert Einstein (1879–1955), on the causes of war—which was later published by the Woolfs at the Hogarth Press—argued that the war was the unleashing of pent-up instinctual aggression, that ‘civilisation’ was a thin veneer of deceptive behaviour covering over untamed brutalities. For those like Virginia Woolf and her pacifist friends, therefore, the war threw doubt on many of the central beliefs and values of ruling-class culture, and especially on military values and patriotism. The war did much to undermine the self-confidence and self-satisfaction of pre-war culture and to initiate a new age of European culture, the age of scepticism.

In fact, however, there was a long delay between the war and the assimilation of its lessons. Just as Septimus Warren Smith’s madness is a delayed reaction to the horrors of the war, so there was in society generally resistance or incapacity to learn from the experience. This failure is a target for Virginia Woolf’s mockery in *Mrs Dalloway*. There were too many who reacted to the war by gruffly exclaiming, as does Dr Holmes to Septimus, that there was nothing whatever the matter and that the best thing was to think about it as little as possible.

There were many other indications that a whole cultural world had irreversibly begun to change in this period. The Revolution that swept away a whole order in what in 1917 became the Soviet Union was an extreme form of this change, of the challenge to the old ruling classes of the world. In Britain, many of the institutions of the modern world had come into being and were about to take their place on the historical stage, including the mass trade unions and the Labour Party. Ramsay MacDonald became Britain’s first Labour Prime Minister in January 1924, six months after the day of Mrs Dalloway’s fictional party.

The other very notable series of changes that form an important part of the background to *Mrs Dalloway*, are those affecting the position of women in society, a topic of very great interest to Virginia Woolf. At the level of personal and social manners, the Bloomsbury Group prided themselves on having been part of that great cultural change which had swept away so much of the repressive prudery of Victorian society. As Peter Walsh remarks in *Mrs Dalloway*, so much more was possible for women in personal behaviour. What women could say, wear or do in public was not regulated by so many extreme conventional prohibitions as in earlier years. Peter Walsh notices, for example, the modern habit of wearing cosmetics, and young people being seen kissing in public. At the social level, many women had been drawn into work during the war and were to some extent able to gain entry into the universities and the professions (Miss Kilman is an example), though still in far fewer numbers than men. Opportunities were still far from equal for men and women, a state of affairs which is largely unchanged today.

At the level of politics, the Suffragettes, who campaigned for votes for women, had declared a truce in the battle for the vote in 1914 with the outbreak of the war, in order the better to contribute to the battle for their country. On 10 August 1914 all Suffragette prisoners were released, and their leader ordered a suspension of all militant activities. Patriotism first! In January 1918 six million women over the age of thirty at last won the right to vote in Britain. It was not until 1928 that full equality of voting rights between men and women was gained. Virginia Woolf worked for the Suffragettes in 1910, addressing envelopes.

Virginia Woolf's position in society was, then, a contradictory one. She came from a wealthy and privileged family background. She enjoyed the society of aristocratic women, though she also made fun of them. She had an inheritance, servants and two homes. On the other hand, she and her husband worked very hard, and regarded themselves as professional people. She thought of herself as an outsider in this male-dominated ruling stratum of society, since as a woman she had been excluded from education, and the power and privileges that go with it. She refused all honours that her fame brought her. All her life she loathed and feared male arrogance, pride and power. She denounced the tyranny of self-important men (Sir William Bradshaw in *Mrs Dalloway* being a famous example). In particular, she hated what she saw as male violence, whether it be the violence of imperial rule, of the State, of war, or the psychological violence of oppression within personal relationships.

This period also saw dramatic developments in art and literature. The English public were exposed to their first taste of modern painting in 1910 when Virginia's friend, the critic, Roger Fry, organised a Post-

Impressionist Exhibition in London (Leonard Woolf was employed as secretary to the Exhibition). She was fascinated by modernist painting and in particular by its ability to represent simultaneously in the picture things which were experienced from different perspectives and at different times. Painting was not restricted by the telling of a story, as novels seemed to be. She was excited by the idea of finding forms of writing that overcame these limitations, that opened up possibilities for fiction equivalent to those enjoyed in painting, for example the possibility of representing people or events from multiple points of view. She wanted to show how each moment in time does not simply pass by but lives on in the reverberations that it sets up in experience, memory and consciousness. Whereas the leaden circles of clock time rapidly fall away and dissolve into the air (as they repeatedly do in *Mrs Dalloway*), the moments of experience are like the waves and ripples that are set in motion when a pebble is thrown into a pool of water, which traverse great distances and affect all sorts of odd distant corners.

Virginia Woolf was enormously excited by the works of the French novelist Marcel Proust (1871–1922), whose novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* she read in 1922 as she was about to begin *Mrs Dalloway* (or *The Hours* as she then significantly called it). She shared with Proust a fascination with time and memory as subjects for exploration in writing, as well as his sense of social satire. Both his novel (conceived, of course, on a far greater scale than hers) and *Mrs Dalloway* climax at a party at which people from the past reappear and are made fun of. That year she also read *Ulysses* (1922) by the Irish novelist James Joyce (1882–1941) and had mixed feelings about it, though the idea of the novel as recording a single day in the lives of the characters and of the city may have been suggested by it. Other authors writing at the time who influenced her, especially in their development of the stream of consciousness narrative technique, were the English novelist Dorothy Richardson (1873–1957), whose novel *Pilgrimage* Virginia Woolf admired, though with some reservations, and the New Zealand writer of short stories, Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923), whom Virginia Woolf regarded as her main rival.

## The genesis of *Mrs Dalloway*

The characters Richard and Clarissa Dalloway first appear in Virginia Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915). They are presented unsympathetically in that novel. Richard is a political reactionary who scoffs at the campaign for votes for women; Clarissa is a superficial snob wholly preoccupied with social rank and success. Virginia Woolf often enjoyed mixing in that world of hostesses and parties and was fascinated with its values and its power to attract people. In 1922 she decided

to go back to Mrs Dalloway as a character, to develop her further, in order to explore that world. She set about writing a series of short stories, of which the first was called 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street', in which Clarissa goes shopping for gloves. She noted in her diary in October 1922 that she had formed the idea of writing a book to be called *The Party* or *At Home*, which was to consist of six or seven chapters converging on Mrs Dalloway's party at the end. Leonard Woolf remarked in his autobiography *Downhill All the Way* that 'the idea of a party always excited her, and in practice she was very sensitive to the actual mental and physical excitement of the party itself, the rise of temperature of mind and body, the ferment and fountain of noise'. The short stories were meant to examine what she called 'party consciousness', the ways that people at parties have of relating to each other and to themselves.

In the course of 1922 the project for a book of stories was abandoned and she set about writing a novel which seems to have been more ambitious in its intention, and more sombre in its mood. What she had in mind was a novel to be called *The Hours*. Some years later she revealed (in an introduction written in 1928 for the American edition of *Mrs Dalloway*) that 'Mrs Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party'. At some point late in 1922 she took the crucial step of introducing into the novel the theme of madness and began to work on the character of Septimus Warren Smith. By the middle of 1923 she was well into the writing of the novel that was to become *Mrs Dalloway*. By then the conception of the novel had become far more complex and much richer. She had added to the original interest in the hostess and the party a treatment of madness and an examination of society and its operation. She recorded in her diary on 19 June 1923: 'In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life & death, sanity & insanity; I want to criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense.' The problem she now faced was that of integrating these disparate themes into one coherent novel via the character of Septimus Warren Smith. She incorporated into the novel rewritten versions of two of the stories that she had written for the earlier project, 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street' and 'The Prime Minister' (which is about the mystery person in the expensive car). The novel was finished in late 1924 and published in 1925.

After she had finished writing *Mrs Dalloway* Virginia Woolf returned to her project of a collection of stories around the theme of a party. She had already written several of these in 1922 and now, in the early months of 1925, she completed the sequence. It was finished by May that year but the stories were not published together as a book until long after Virginia Woolf's death. They are now available as *Mrs Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence*. Her diaries, in which so

much information about the writing of *Mrs Dalloway* and of all her other novels can be found, are now also all published. (For details see Part 5 below.)

## A note on the text

*Mrs Dalloway* was published on 14 May 1925 by the Hogarth Press, London. It has since been published in many languages and editions. Page references in these Notes refer to the paperback edition published by Triad Panther Books (Granada Publishing Ltd), London, in 1976 with numerous subsequent reprints.

## Part 2

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# Summaries

of MRS DALLOWAY

## A general summary

The events narrated in *Mrs Dalloway* all take place on a single day in mid-June 1923. The novel opens with Clarissa Dalloway going out, at about ten o'clock in the morning, to buy flowers for a party she is to have at her house that evening. The novel closes as the party begins to fade at around midnight. Throughout the novel the reader is kept informed of the passing of time through the day, by the chiming of clocks, most often of Big Ben, the clock at the Houses of Parliament in Westminster, the district of London where the Dalloways live. Since the novel is not divided into chapters, this marking of the passage of time at intervals provides a regular and objective framework. The second objective framework within which everything takes place is that of London itself. The characters move around London. The city provides a space for interesting encounters and constantly changing perspectives. As the characters move around the city, all going about their private business, their paths cross or they witness the same events (such as the plane flying above them). The narration shifts from one character to another so that the events of the day are told from many points of view.

Contrasting with these predictable and objective frameworks of space and time are the subjective lives of each of the characters. Throughout the day, characters remember the past, fantasise about the future, speculate about each other and attend with greater or lesser degrees of success to the present. For much of the novel we follow the consciousness of Clarissa Dalloway. She prepares for her party, stops to mend a dress, and is then interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Peter Walsh, who loved her and wanted to marry her when she was young. Clarissa also attends to her seventeen-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, who goes out with her tutor, a woman whom Clarissa hates intensely. She sees her husband briefly in the afternoon. Later we find her at the beginning of her party, nervous in case it is a failure, and then again later as the evening goes by when she is more confident. Her party is interrupted when she happens to hear from Lady Bradshaw the news of the suicide of a young man called Septimus Warren Smith.

We have followed Septimus, a veteran of the war who is suffering from delayed shell-shock and is mentally unbalanced, and his Italian



wife Lucrezia (or Rezia), in the course of their day. They have walked round London, sat in a park (where they happened to see Peter Walsh) waiting for a consultation with the distinguished doctor Sir William Bradshaw. Septimus is often delirious and his wife is deeply miserable, embarrassed when Septimus talks to himself in public, and terrified when he threatens to kill himself. Bradshaw immediately sees that he is severely ill and insists that he must go away to a nursing home. Later, at their home, the Warren Smiths find a few moments of happiness and normality but then their own doctor, Holmes, arrives and Septimus, refusing to submit to the power of the doctors, throws himself from his window and dies almost at once.

Weaving in and out of the account of the day as it is experienced by these characters, there is also recounted from time to time the consciousness of Peter Walsh, of Clarissa's husband Richard, a Conservative Member of Parliament, of Elizabeth and of her tutor, Miss Doris Kilman. Throughout the day characters remember a particularly significant time of their lives, a summer spent at Clarissa's family home, Bourton, when she was eighteen. The events of that summer had decisively influenced the entire course of her life, for she had then rejected Peter Walsh and decided to marry Richard Dalloway. She had also experienced a youthful infatuation with Sally Seton, a rebellious young girl who also reappears unexpectedly, turning up at Clarissa's party transformed into Lady Rosseter.

Clarissa Dalloway's attention during the day comes back again and again to thoughts about death. She has been ill and feels aware of age and of the rapid passing of her life. She thinks about the war and those who died in it. She thinks of her sister who died when she was young in a particularly horrible accident which Clarissa herself witnessed. She recites a quotation from Shakespeare: 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun/Nor the furious winter's rages', and this calms her and takes away the terror of death. (Septimus recites the same lines at a moment of repose during the afternoon.) When she hears of Septimus's death she strangely gains strength and reassurance from it.

At the close of the novel we find that we have not followed a story in the normal sense of the word. Very little has happened. We have circled around Mrs Dalloway so that she has been seen from many points of view, both internal and external, and now we have a sense that we are familiar with her, that we have come to know who she is. The novel ends with Clarissa simply appearing on the stairs at her party. 'For there she was.'

## Detailed summaries

The novel is not divided into chapters. Virginia Woolf divided it into sections by leaving an extra space between paragraphs at some points.