

***Mrs Dalloway* Centenary Essay Plan (1,000 words)**

Title: TBD

Introduction (150 words)

- Hook: the centenary of *Mrs Dalloway*¹ and why returning to Woolf's minor motif of dance can reveal fresh insights.
 - Set up dance as a modernist figure of vitality, rhythm, and memory.
 - State argument: In *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf uses the motif of dance—both remembered and absent—to illuminate Clarissa's interior life, where movement embodies memory, vitality, and fleeting joy, while its deferrals and parodies expose the limits of social reality and the fragility of modernist aspirations to capture the rhythms of everyday life.
 - Mention method: combining close reading with criticism on modernism, embodiment, and rhythm (mention possible critics: Rachel Bowlby on everyday life, Jessica Berman on modernism and politics, David Trotter on modernist form and movement?).
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Section 1: Dance and Memory (200 words)

- Close read Clarissa's memories of "dancing all night" and "driving home across the Park" (pp. 6, 12).
 - Show how dance links to her past vitality and to collective memory ("But everyone remembered").
 - Argument: Woolf uses remembered dance to fuse individual memory with social rhythm.
 - Possible critic: Hermione Lee on Woolf's interest in memory and social connection?
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Section 2: Parody and Constraint (200 words)

- Hugh Whitbread's sycophantic "dance" (pp. 263–264).
- Contrast hollow, mechanical "dancing forward" with Clarissa's remembered joy.

¹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925).

- This parody undercuts vitality, showing how social ritual contains and flattens movement.
 - Critic: Alex Zwerdling on Woolf's critique of social conventions?
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Section 3: Absence and Aspiration (200 words)

- "I had meant to have dancing" (pp. 270–271).
 - Explore how the absence of dance dramatises thwarted vitality in Clarissa's present.
 - Youth are "solidifying"; Clarissa longs for fluid, unbounded movement.
 - Argue that dance here is both aspiration and regret: Woolf uses its absence to expose temporal limits.
 - Critic: Julia Briggs on Woolf's experiments with time and missed possibilities?
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Section 4: Modernist Vitality (200 words)

- Bring strands together: memory, parody, absence.
 - Dance as a modernist motif of fleeting vitality: it never settles, always slipping into the past, into parody, or into absence.
 - Dance thus mirrors Woolf's modernist aesthetic: rhythmic, fluid, and fragmented.
 - Critics: David Bradshaw or Michael H. Whitworth on modernism, vitality, and embodied experience?
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Conclusion (150 words)

- Reaffirm: dance in *Mrs Dalloway* is a key motif with major implications.
- It stages the tension between memory and loss, vitality and stasis, aspiration and constraint.
- Dance crystallises Woolf's modernist concern with how fleeting rhythms shape consciousness and social life.
- Suggest relevance: why a century later the dance motif still illuminates Woolf's radical experimentation with the everyday.