To the Lighthouse

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

Born into a prestigious literary family (her grandfather was William Thackeray), Virginia Stephen became an important part of London's literary scene at a young age. She married the writer Leonard Woolf with whom she founded the Hogarth Press in 1917, which published all of her later novels as well as works by T.S. Eliot and other literary luminaries of the time. Woolf's experiments with prose marked a radical departure from the tradition of the Victorian novel and created fresh possibilities for the novelistic form. Her works such as *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Waves*, and *To the Lighthouse*, are to this day widely influential. Following the early deaths of her parents and sister, Woolf suffered periodic nervous breakdowns throughout her life and, in 1941, fearing another breakdown, she drowned herself in the River Ouse.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At the turn of the nineteenth century, new scientific developments usurped long-held worldviews and raised new questions about the nature of reality and human experience. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection subverted traditional beliefs in a world governed by God, and, as Darwin's work contradicted people's understanding of the world around them, Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious undermined people's understandings of themselves by pointing out a mysterious region of the mind to which no one had conscious access. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf's interest in the equal unknowability of the world and the human brain reflect the influence of such contemporary scientific theories.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The novel's most closely related literary works are Woolf's other novels, including *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves*, also written in the stream of consciousness form that characterizes *To the Lighthouse*. Yet, around the time of Woolf's writing, other novelists were experimenting with stream of consciousness, too, and their resultant works – including Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* – serve as productive points of contrast and comparison with Woolf's own prose experiment.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *To the Lighthouse*
- **When Written:** 1925-1927
- **Where Written:** London and Sussex
- **When Published:** 1927
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Novel of Consciousness
- **Setting:** Isle of Skye, Scotland 1910-1920
- **Climax:** Mrs. Ramsay's vision of eternity at the dinner table
- **Point of View:** Multiple

EXTRA CREDIT

Semiautobigoraphy. Although the plot of *To the Lighthouse* shares many similarities with Woolf's own biography (Woolf's family rented a summerhouse on the Hebrides in view of a lighthouse, Woolf's father could be stifling, Woolf's mother and sister died when she was young), Woolf correctly insisted that the novel should not be read as a straightforward autobiography.

Bestseller. Upon completion, Woolf declared *To the Lighthouse* her best book and, indeed, the book-buying public agreed. Outselling all her previous novels (including *Mrs. Dalloway*), *To the Lighthouse* earned Woolf enough money to buy a car for her and Leonard.

PLOT SUMMARY

In a summerhouse on the Isle of Skye, James is enraged when Mr. Ramsay insists he won't get to go to **the Lighthouse** the next day. Mr. Tansley echoes Mr. Ramsay. Mrs. Ramsay tries to preserve James' hope. She reflects on Mr. Tansley's charmlessness, then recalls his confiding in her about his poverty. Lily struggles to paint on the lawn. She agrees to accompany Mr. Bankes on a walk and they discuss the Ramsays. Meanwhile, Mr. Ramsay argues with his wife about the Lighthouse again, aggravating James. Mr. Ramsay meditates by the sea. After walking, Mr. Bankes admires Mrs. Ramsay and Lily considers the vivacity distinguishing her beauty. Lily explains her painting to Mr. Bankes.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ramsay wishes Cam and James could stay small, thinking she's not pessimistic (as her husband says), just realistic. She worries about Nancy, Andrew, Paul, and Minta on their walk. After James goes to bed, Mrs. Ramsay watches the Lighthouse, thinking, a sight which saddens Mr. Ramsay. She walks with him, chatting affectionately. Mr. Bankes and Lily walk, too, discussing painting, then the Ramsays. They come upon Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay who seem suddenly symbolic in the spell of evening.

On the cliffs, Nancy, Minta, Paul, and Andrew have separated and reunited awkwardly on the sight of Minta and Paul embracing. Their return is delayed by Minta's lost brooch, which Paul chivalrously determines to find. He has successfully proposed to Minta. Minta sobs for more, Nancy feels, than the brooch.

At the summerhouse, Mrs. Ramsay lets Jasper and Rose help her dress and is relieved when the walk party returns. Though she despairs at dinner's start, Lily helps her manage small talk and the conversation eventually carries the night into an orderly beauty that Mrs. Ramsay believes partakes of eternity. Mr. Tansley and Mr. Bankes flounder, then find footing at the table. Lily feels burned by lovestruck Paul's indifference, and decides not to marry. After dinner, Mrs. Ramsay coaxes Cam and James to sleep, sends Prue, Paul, Minta, Lily, and Andrew off on a walk, then joins Mr. Ramsay reading. She feels transported by a sonnet. After reading, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay say little but still express their deep love for one another.

Nights pass, then the season. Mrs. Ramsay dies suddenly. The house stays empty. Prue marries, then dies in childbirth, and Andrew dies in World War I. Mr. Carmichael gets famous. Mrs. McNab eventually gives up on caring for the house, which falls into disrepair. Then, after ten years, Mrs. McNab receives word to prepare the house and laboriously does so. Lily and Mr. Carmichael return.

The first morning back, Mr. Ramsay forces the teenage Cam and James to go to the Lighthouse with him. Lily fails to avoid him before they leave. During an awkward conversation, Lily feels Mr. Ramsay silently pleading for her sympathy and feels like a defective woman for not giving it. Mr. Ramsay sets off with a resentful Cam and James and Lily feels guilty. She tries to paint but is distracted by thoughts of Mrs. Ramsay and questions life's meaning.

At sea, Cam and James have a pact of silence against their father's imperious bossiness. Cam doesn't break it even as she's tempted to give in to her father's attempts to engage her, admiring him as she does.

Lily considers Paul and Minta's failed marriage and her own singleness and wants to show the matchmaking Mrs. Ramsay how wrong her instincts were. Suddenly, Lily tears up at Mrs. Ramsay's ghost and life's senselessness. She looks for Mr. Ramsay's sailboat, wanting to give him her sympathy.

At sea, James inwardly contrasts his father and mother. Cam feels spontaneously joyous and loves Mr. Ramsay.

On land, Lily observes how little one can know of other people's lives and reminisces about the Ramsays. She reflects that the greatest skill is to see the world as simultaneously ordinary and miraculous.

At sea, Mr. Ramsay finally gives James the praise he craves, but James conceals his joy. Reaching shore, Mr. Ramsay leaps eagerly towards the Lighthouse.

On land, Lily and Mr. Carmichael agree Mr. Ramsay has reached the Lighthouse. Lily paints a final line and is satisfied, even knowing her painting will be forgotten. She has had her vision.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Ramsay – Beautiful, charming, and nurturing, Mrs. Ramsey holds the Ramsay family together as she holds together every social context she enters by her charisma and instinct for putting people at ease. Mrs. Ramsay also holds *To the Lighthouse* together, for the novel's shape is structured around her: her perspective dominates Chapter 1 and, even after she dies in Chapter 2, Mrs. Ramsay remains central in Chapter 3 as the surviving Ramsays manage their grief and Lily revisits her memories of Mrs. Ramsay and makes peace with her ghost. For her own part, Mrs. Ramsay exalts in the beauty of the world and, though she insists she is no thinker, frequently reflects on the nature of time and human experience. An eager matchmaker, Mrs. Ramsay is also, as Lily sees, an artist who can make out of the fleeting moment "something permanent"

Lily Briscoe – Observant, philosophical, and independent, Lily is a painter pitied by Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in Chapter 1 for her homeliness and unattractiveness to men. Still, though Mrs. Ramsay thinks nothing of her painting and wants her to marry, she admires Lily's independence. In Chapter 3, Lily struggles (and eventually succeeds) in painting the picture she had first attempted in Chapter 1, all the while revisiting memories of Mrs. Ramsay and contemplating the great mysteries of life, death, art, and human experience.

Mr. Ramsay – As brilliant and passionate as he is petty, bossy, and demanding, Mr. Ramsay is a victim of his own mercurial moods and is always shifting in the opinion of those around him. Characters loathe his imperiousness and neediness, then admire his courage and dignity. In Chapter 1, Mr. Ramsay adores Mrs. Ramsay and his children but struggles with angry outbursts and self-doubt about his career. In Chapter 3, Mr. Ramsay remains just as needy of female sympathy (especially since Mrs. Ramsay is no longer around to dispense it) but wishes, looking back, that he had not been so quick to anger.

James Ramsay – One of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's children, James is as bitter and resentful of his father as a six-year-old in Chapter 1 as he is as a sixteen-year-old in Chapter 3. Yet, by Chapter 3, James has learned to distinguish between his father's person and his father's imperious moods and can identify some of his own similarities to Mr. Ramsay.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Cam Ramsay – One of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's children, Cam is a wild seven-year-old girl in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 3, a dreamy seventeen-year-old who imagines fantastic adventures

and secretly admires her father despite his imperiousness.

Charles Tansley – An impoverished, priggish, self-absorbed, and charmless student of Mr. Ramsay's who stays at the summerhouse in Chapter 1. Despised by everyone, Mr. Tansley tries desperately to "assert" himself and is self-righteous about his financial independence, snobbery, and parsimoniousness.

William Bankes – Even-tempered and judicious, Mr. Bankes is a bachelor botanist and old friend of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay who stays at the summerhouse in Chapter 1. Though Mrs. Ramsay hopes he will marry Lily, he and Lily instead enjoy a lifelong platonic friendship.

Nancy Ramsay – One of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's children, Nancy accompanies Andrew, Paul, and Minta on their walk along the cliffs and intuits Minta's inward desperation, though she is too young to fully understand its cause.

Paul Rayley – A dumb but good-hearted young man—what Mrs. Ramsay affectionately calls a "boobie"—Paul is a visitor at the summerhouse in Chapter 1 and is inspired by Mrs. Ramsay to propose to Minta. The lovestruck Paul's utter indifference to Lily defines Lily's lifelong understanding of romantic love.

Mr. Carmichael – A dreamy opium addict and unknown poet in Chapter 1, Mr. Carmichael's poetry meets unexpected success during World War I and he is famous by Chapter 3. Yet, in both chapters, Mr. Carmichael is most often seen sitting in a sleepy, silent daze on the summerhouse lawn.

Andrew Ramsay – The most intelligent of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's children, Andrew is a budding mathematician in Chapter 1 of whom Mr. Carmichael is especially fond. Soon after Mrs. Ramsay's death, Andrew dies in World War I.

Minta Doyle – A golden and voluptuous tomboy of whom Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are both extremely fond, Minta stays at the summerhouse in Chapter 1. At Mrs. Ramsay's encouragement, Minta is engaged to Paul Rayley, though the marriage turns out to be a failure.

Prue Ramsay – The most beautiful of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's children, Prue is just on the verge of entering womanhood in Chapter 1 and admires Minta wonderingly. In Chapter 2, Prue marries soon after Mrs. Ramsay's death, then dies a few months later in childbirth.

Rose Ramsay – One of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's children, Rose has a sophisticated aesthetic sense despite her young age and arranges the fruit bowl on the dinner table in Chapter I to breathtaking effect.

Jasper Ramsay – One of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's children, Jasper shoots birds with little remorse as a young child in Chapter 1 and is said to care for Cam's puppy a decade later in Chapter 3.

Roger Ramsay – One of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's children, Roger is wild and adventurous, like Nancy.

Mrs. McNub – The world-weary caretaker and housekeeper for the summerhouse who maintains (then abandons) the house in the Ramsays' absence and prepares it for their return.

The Swiss Maid – A young maid in the summerhouse, the Swiss Maid's melancholy about her father dying in the mountains touches Mrs. Ramsay to the core.

Macalister – A Scottish fisherman and native of the Isle of Skye, Macalister accompanies Mr. Ramsay, James, and Cam to **the Lighthouse**.

Macalister's Boy – A Scottish fisherman and native of the Isle of Skye, Macalister's Boy assists Macalister and accompanies Mr. Ramsay, James, and Cam to **the Lighthouse**.

Mrs. Bast – A native of the Isle of Skye, Mrs. Bast helps Mrs. McNub prepare the summerhouse for the Ramsays' return after ten years have passed.

Mildred – The cook at the Ramsay's house on the Isle of Skye.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

TIME

To the Lighthouse explores time at every scale, tracking the intricate thoughts and impressions within a single lived second while also meditating on the infinity of geologic time stretching back into the past and forward into the future beyond the span of human knowledge. Between these two extremes, the novel presents the different measures of time out of which individual experience is composed. Part 1, The Window, and Part 2, The Lighthouse, occur almost in "real time," as the action described takes place within a period more or less equivalent to the period of time it takes to read the section. Within these sections, each character's perspective picks up on an immense range of detail and the observant Mrs. Ramsay and Lily are especially conscious of the unique specificity of each moment. The novel also explores the vacation time of the Ramsays and their guests, for whom the scenes of the novel are lived within a "break" from their normal lives in London, and the circular, ritual time of communal activity and habit, as the characters repeat the daily routines of walks and dinners, react to one another in predictable ways, and repeatedly profess long-held opinions. Zooming out from daily life, *To the Lighthouse* reflects on time's larger frameworks as Mrs. Ramsay considers the irretrievable time of childhood and she, along with Mr. Ramsay and Lily, confront human tininess in the course of the Earth's

existence. Yet Mrs. Ramsay and Lily (and, though he has his doubts, Mr. Ramsay) believe that it is possible to make "something permanent" out of the moment, and thus Lily paints to partake of eternity as Mrs. Ramsay orchestrates lived experience until it becomes as transcendent as art. In Part 2, Time Passing, the "real time" of The Window accelerates to breakneck speed and the section spans a whole decade in just a few pages. Without much attention to detail, this view on time lacks the particularity and complexity of time in The Window and is characterized only by a barebones framework of events. Thus, the enormity of Mrs. Ramsay's, Prue's, and Andrew's deaths, and of World War I, are reduced to one sentence parentheticals.

As committed as it is to capturing an experience of lived time, *To the Lighthouse* is just as interested in the relics that linger after experience, and the novel holds up many different forms of memory. There is the history book memory of impartially and sparely recounted event as demonstrated in the bullet-like plot points of Part 2, Time Passing. There is the circular memory Mrs. Ramsay has thinking back on her youth, recognizing in her children's youth their own future memories, and feeling life to be a cycle of marriage and childbearing passed on from generation to generation. There is the living memory of Mrs. McNab and Lily as their recollected images of Mrs. Ramsay appear visible on the surface of the present world.

To the Lighthouse ultimately demonstrates the inadequacy of clock time to measure human experience: life is not felt, Woolf shows, second by orderly second. Instead, one minute seems to drag on an eternity while the next two decades speed by. One is one second aware of a human lifespan as a long, luxurious stretch and the next second perceives it to be an infinitesimal fraction of Earth's much more enduring existence. Memories return in the present and live on, sometimes seeming never to have passed.

THE MEANING OF LIFE

Characters throughout *To the Lighthouse* question life's ultimate meaning and supply different answers based on their own perspectives and on the circumstances that surround their questioning. Mrs. Ramsay understands the meaning of life to be family and domestic happiness, while Mr. Bankes and Mr. Tansley understand it to be work and professional success. Mr. Ramsay vacillates between these answers, finding ultimate meaning sometimes in family, sometimes in philosophy. Lily thinks life's greatest meaning lies in making art.

Yet even as each character's thoughts and behavior seem to present a loose argument for each "meaning," no character ever feels personally confident or satisfied with one answer. Their moments of conviction are always shadowed by doubt. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay despairs at the start of dinner in The Window, feeling her marriage, her family, and her life are hollow and worthless. Thus, Mr. Ramsay continually doubts himself, one moment disparaging his family life, the next moment his professional life, and forever relying on Mrs. Ramsay for sympathy and praise to soothe his spirits. Thus, Mr. Tansley experiences bitter anguish and hurt at the dinner table, proving how much weight he actually gives to the very world of human relations he calls meaningless. Thus, Lily repeatedly turns on herself, belittling her life choices and criticizing her painting.

No matter where the characters of *To the Lighthouse* find meaning in their lives, those meanings are integrally related to the theme of Time. A character's perspective on life is always affected by that character's relationship to time. When characters feel that human action transcends mortality to endure the ages or when they are able to luxuriate in the present moment and feel the breadth of a human lifespan, then they are able to feel life is meaningful, worthwhile. Thus, reading Sir Walter Scott, Ramsay feels that the ongoing torch of human accomplishment passed from person to person is much more meaningful than the identity of each individual torch carrier. Thinking this way, he no longer worries about his own achievements and feels happy knowing that his work in philosophy will be carried on by other thinkers in the future. On the other hand, Mr. Bankes, on tasting Mrs. Ramsay's beef dish at dinner, is finally grounded in the pleasure of the present moment and can thereby see the merit in domestic rituals he'd previously considered meaningless.

There is, ultimately, no one meaning of life and, instead of reaching for one, the novel shows that meaning is subjective, contingent upon circumstance and perspective. Each life, then, contains many "meanings," which shift and change from year to year, from moment to moment.

THE NATURE OF INTERIOR LIFE

Written as a stream of consciousness, *To the Lighthouse* constantly investigates the contours and patterns of human thought through its form and style. While writing within the perspective of a single character, Woolf's sentences leap back and forth between various impressions, memories, and emotions, formally illustrating the associative nature of an individual mind. Lofty thoughts stand on par with everyday ones. Mrs. Ramsay's mind alone leaps between thoughts on the nature of compassion, the relationship between men and women, household budgeting, her children's futures, the state of her society, and the state of the beef dish she'll be serving at dinner. Emotions, too, flash quickly in and out so that Mrs. Ramsay's indignation at Mr. Ramsay's exclamation "damn you" is restored to admiration just a few seconds later when he offers to double-check on the weather he has so adamantly insisted will be poor. While capable of such quicksilver change, the mind is also capable of extended preservation, so that Mr. Tansley's insult floats in

Lily's mind ten years later even after she's forgotten who said it.

Over the course of the novel, Woolf is also constantly leaping back and forth between the minds of different characters. Though everyone's mind shares an associative, eclectic tendency, individual minds are also distinguishable enough from one another that Woolf sometimes doesn't even have to indicate that she's leapt from one person's perspective to another's, as when the text jumps from Lily's to Mrs. Ramsey's mind at the end of dinner in The Window. Likewise, Mr. Ramsay's stream of consciousness is immediately distinguishable from Mrs. Ramsay's in its lack of particular, material detail (the flowers, stars, and other such quotidian beauties that Mrs. Ramsay laments his inability to notice). As it slides in and out of different characters' minds, the novel's figuration further suggests that the divide between internal and external life might not be so rigid after all. Repeating metaphors of the mind as a pool of water and as a beehive transform abstract, private thought into a concrete, shared element of the natural world.

Every aspect of the novel speaks to the diversity of interior life: the diversity of disparate thoughts within an individual stream of consciousness as well as the diversity of different thoughts and thought patterns that characterize different individuals' streams of consciousness. Lily's reflection towards novel's end that in order to see Mrs. Ramsey clearly a person would need "fifty pairs of eyes" (since each of those pairs would have such different insights into her character) can be read as a description of the novel itself: written through many separate pairs of eyes to achieve the most complete possible vision.

ART AND BEAUTY

As it examines the nature of interior life, so *To the Lighthouse* examines the nature of art and beauty, giving credence to commonly accepted understandings even as it puts forth alternative definitions. Weaving in pieces of a Sir Walter Scott novel and the lines from a Shakespeare sonnet, *To the Lighthouse* showcases the beauty of canonical art masterpieces, and in the person of Mrs. Ramsay, the novel presents a traditional ideal of human beauty. Indeed, Mr. Bankes imagines her "classical" beauty on the other end of the telephone.

The power of such beauty—in both art and humans—can work for good. The literature the characters read gives joy and consolation, as Mrs. Ramsey delights in the loveliness of the sonnet's words and Scott's prose frees Mr. Ramsey from anxiety about his public image. Further, such artworks can inspire faith in an all-encompassing human project. After reading Scott, Mr. Ramsey no longer cares whether it is he or someone else who "reaches Z" – someone will, he knows, and that's enough. Mrs. Ramsay's human beauty likewise consoles and inspires: those around her admire her and feel strengthened by her spirit. Mr. Tansley is filled with happiness just by sharing Mrs. Ramsay's presence and attempts to be kinder and more generous for her sake. Paul attributes his courage to propose to Minta to Mrs. Ramsay's effect upon him. Still, beauty can also exert less positive influences. Lily observes that beauty can reduce and obscure, concealing the complexity of life beneath it. Admiring Mrs. Ramsay's beauty, Lily tries to see past it to "the living thing" that so animates her.

As it considers the nature of beauty, the novel also considers beauty's makers. The characters of Mr. Carmichael and Lily afford a view on art in the process of being created by as-yet unestablished artists. In each case, beauty springs unexpected from unlovely circumstances. Out of the opium-addicted, shuffling Mr. Carmichael of The Window springs the incongruous sublimity of his poems, which meet with such apparent success subsequently. Through Lily's meager existence, self-doubts, and despair arrives the painting she completes in the novel's last section. Yet the novel does not limit the making of beauty to the production of fine art objects. It understands human conduct and daily life as a form of art also. Thus Mrs. Ramsey's orchestration of herself, her family, and her guests is repeatedly described in terms ordinarily applied to artistic composition and Lily recognizes Mrs. Ramsay's person as an aesthetic force, a masterpiece.

In broadening our understanding of art and beauty, the novel shifts the emphasis from finished product to process – rather than limiting "art" to concrete, enduring, delimited artifacts, the novel shows that art can also be a spirit, a frame of mind, a form of vision. Thus, Lily ends the novel satisfied even though she knows that her painting itself will not be immortalized, will almost certainly be forgotten. She feels content knowing that she has participated in art and beauty just by making the painting, just by having "her vision."

GENDER

Though the novel's stream of consciousness jumps from perspective to perspective, the theme of gender remains in focus as each character considers gender roles and relations from his or her own standpoint. Mrs. Ramsey delights in her womanhood, successfully fulfilling the traditional female roles of caregiver, homemaker, beauty, comforter of men. Lily, on the other hand, resents those same traditional roles, resisting the pressure to fill them and then, when she succeeds in such resistance, feeling her defiant pride undercut by anxiety and self-doubt. Having successfully refused to give Mr. Ramsay the female sympathy he craves in The Lighthouse, for example, Lily thinks she must be a failure as a woman and, wracked by regret, spends the rest of the morning trying to make it up to him. Among the male characters, Mr. Tansley and Mr. Ramsay aspire to strength, chivalry, and intellectualism, trying to inhabit the traditional male role of female protector and evincing an enduring prejudice against female "irrationality" and

"simplicity." Still, even as the men look down on women, they depend on them. Mr. Tansley and Mr. Ramsay are both utterly reliant on Mrs. Ramsay and other female characters for praise and crave female sympathy to keep their egos afloat. Even when Mr. Ramsay recognizes this need as a weakness in himself, he remains unable to overcome it and thus demands of Lily in The Lighthouse the same sort of support he'd demanded from his wife ten years earlier in The Window.

Aside from considering men and women's individual gender roles, the novel also considers the gender relations within a marriage and presents two models of domestic union. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay represent the conventional ideal (indeed, Lily thinks they have suddenly transcended themselves and become a symbol as they stand on the lawn). Though the marriage of course possesses its gender-bending quirks—Mr. Ramsay is emotionally needier, Mrs. Ramsay, more emotionally restrained—it generally operates as a conventional heterosexual romantic partnership: Mr. Ramsey is the "rational" breadwinner, Mrs. Ramsey the "comforting" homemaker. They love one another deeply and act as a team. Within this model, both are happy. Mrs. Ramsay especially praises the virtues of marriage and her eager matchmaking attempts to set up all single characters in a marriage like hers.

Though not seen first-hand, Minta and Paul's marriage as imagined by Lily in The Lighthouse presents a point of contrast with the Ramsay marriage. It's hinted in The Window that Minta is not entirely happy about being betrothed to Paul, and the subsequent marriage is rife with struggle and argument. Yet, over the years, relations between Paul and Minta are repaired by something that would traditionally be considered a marriage disaster: Paul takes a mistress and, thereafter, he and Minta are a team again. Remembering Mrs. Ramsay in The Lighthouse, Lily imagines holding up the example of Minta and Paul as well as of her own contented, unmarried life as evidence that Mrs. Ramsay was wrong to advocate so single-mindedly for conventional marriages. Indeed, the novel presents marriage and gender alike as complex, continued negotiations between the sexes, each facing a set of expectations that seldom fit but are nevertheless worked around, worked through, and reinvented.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE LIGHTHOUSE

The Lighthouse symbolizes human desire, a force that pulsates over the indifferent **sea** of the natural world and guides people's passage across it. Yet even as the Lighthouse stands constant night and day, season after season, it remains curiously unattainable. James' frustrated desire to visit the Lighthouse begins the novel, and Mrs. Ramsay looks at the Lighthouse as she denies Mr. Ramsay the profession of love he wants so badly at the end of Chapter 1. James, finally reaching the Lighthouse in Chapter 3 a decade after he'd first wanted to go, sees that, up close, the Lighthouse looks nothing like it does from across the bay. That misty image he'd desired from a distance remains unattainable even when he can sail right up to the structure it's supposedly attached to. The novel's title can be understood as a description for experience itself: one moves through life propelled by desire towards the things one wants, and yet seems rarely to reach them. One's life, then, is the process of moving towards, of reaching, of desiring. It is "to" the Lighthouse, not "at" it.

THE SEA

The sea symbolizes the natural world and its utter apathy towards human life. The natural world – which encompasses time and mortality – proceeds as usual regardless of whether humans are happy or grieving, in peace or at war. Like the incontrovertible fact of death gradually claiming human youth and beauty, the sea slowly eats away at the land, dissolving it minute by minute. Like the relentless progression of a clock's hand, the waves beat ceaselessly on the beach and slow for no one. The sea itself is unchangeable, and the many different descriptions of the sea throughout the novel in fact describe shifting human opinions. As if it were a mirror, people see in the sea a reflection of their own state of mind. Thus, when Mrs. Ramsay feels safe and secure, the waves sound soothing, but when she feels disoriented, the sound of the waves seems violent and ominous. Thus, during World War I, the ocean appears senseless and brutal, but in peacetime it appears orderly and beautiful.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt edition of *To the Lighthouse* published in 1989.

The Window, 1 Quotes

❝ Indeed, she had the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valour, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude towards herself which no woman could fail to find agreeable, something trustful, childlike, reverential…

Related Characters: Mrs. Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Ramsay offers these sympathetic comments on men after complaining about the character flaws of Charles Tansley. She wonders what precisely causes her to take such a positive stance on the sex.

That Mrs. Ramsay feels men are "under her protection" seems to put her in a position of empowerment, for she determines if they are seen positively or negatively. But that instinct also indicates the power men have exerted on her. Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay seems unable to fully explain her solicitous behavior, indicating it may be irrational or socially constructed. She attempts to brainstorm a variety of reasons: perhaps due to old-fashioned character tropes like "chivalry and valour," perhaps pragmatically for legal, political, and economic reasons, or perhaps because of how men allow her to be agreeable within her own and others' minds.

Woolf begins at the novel's onset a subtle exploration of gender relations within a traditionally patriarchal society. She renders Mrs. Ramsay neither a crusader for female independence nor a simple domestically-confined housewife. Rather, Mrs. Ramsay reveals an awareness of the male forces that dictate her life and finds a source of empowerment in that awareness. Perhaps her protection is not blind, but rather a resourceful calibration of how men can be made useful to her. She is capable, Woolf demonstrates, of interrogating why she embraces traditional gender roles through this interior monologue, while maintaining the external presentation of social decorum.

> …it was only in silence, looking up from their plates, after she had spoken so severely about Charles Tansley, that her daughters—Prue, Nancy, Rose—could sport with infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers; in Paris, perhaps; a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other; for there was in all their minds a mute questioning of deference and chivalry, of the Bank of England and the Indian Empire, of ringed fingers and lace, though to them all there was something in this of the essence of beauty, which called out the manliness in their girlish hearts, and made them, as they sat at table beneath their mother's eyes, honour her strange severity, her extreme courtesy…

Related Characters: Mrs. Ramsay, Charles Tansley, Prue Ramsay, Rose Ramsay, Nancy Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6-7

Explanation and Analysis

After Mrs. Ramsay has lectured on Charles Tansley's shortcomings, she pauses, and this space allows her children to reflect on their relationship to their mother—and on the distance between her worldview and theirs.

That the children are only able to visualize these alternative futures "in silence" points to how extensively Mrs. Ramsay has determined her children's personal and social realities. Any idea on "a life different from hers" is deemed "infidel," as if she has formed a religious cult around womanhood that can define what is spiritually good and evil. The main point of contention concerns men: to have a "wider life" to to question the "deference and chivalry" that Mrs. Ramsay has previously held up as essential to her personality. Indeed, this passage engages directly with the reasons she might find men defensible, citing first chivalry and then economic and political forces: "the Bank of England and the Indian Empire."

By retracing these same potential reasons to laud and value men, the children conclude that there is indeed something inspiring about their mother—precisely because she can elicit "the manliness in their girlish hearts." That is to say, Mrs. Ramsay's unique skill is to rely on gender roles and binaries but to be so adept at maneuvering them that she turns what might be disempowering into a form of empowerment. Consider, for instance, how Woolf takes terms like "severity" and "courtesy" that might both be fodder for critique—and instead with the addition of the adjectives "strange" and "extreme" marks them as warped but useful social tools. Playing off of these stereotypes may make Mrs. Ramsay the subject of her daughters' critique, but she also inspires their "honour."

> Charles Tansley felt an extraordinary pride; felt the wind and the cyclamen and the violets for he was walking with a beautiful woman for the first time in his life. He had hold of her bag.

Related Characters: Charles Tansley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Ramsay recalls her and Tansley's walk during which he manages to grab hold of her bag. Tansley basks in the joy of accompanying her and playing a traditional masculine role.

The pride felt at finally having hold of her bag notably contrasts with Mrs. Ramsay's earlier resistances to him holding it. That rejection seemed to resist the very codes of chivalry Mrs. Ramsay has praied, and here she lapses back into the traditional role much to Tansley's delight. Yet if Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts on their interaction were conveyed in a series of complicated assessments, Tansley's are oddly reductive and straightforward. He offers little compelling or notable analysis on the situation and feels just a banal "pride" for being with "a beautiful woman."

This disjoint in the narrative voice reveals two key elements of these characters: First it reiterates Mrs. Ramsay's incredible power over men, in which she can cause his entire perception of reality to shift with relative ease. And secondly it casts Tansley as supremely unperceptive. Woolf is able to illuminate this difference by bestowing on certain characters more complete and nuanced opinions. So her narration style allows her to show the disconnect in the way Tansley and Mrs. Ramsay would experience their walk—and even the social interaction of the purse. One may find great depths of significance and complexity; another will just see general beauty and pride.

The Window, 3 Quotes

❝ ...the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again as she sat with the children the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, 'I am guarding you—I am your support', but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea, and warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow...

Related Characters: Mrs. Ramsay

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15-16

Explanation and Analysis

The conversation on plans to see the lighthouse pauses once more, and Mrs. Ramsay suddenly becomes preoccupied by the sound of the waves outside. She observes how the ocean can be both calming and frightening depending on the context in which she hears it.

Woolf is playing here with a writing technique called the "pathetic fallacy." The term was coined for poets who described a natural phenomenon as if it has human emotion, when in fact the emotion actually belonged to the speaker of the poem or the poet. (It is a fallacy because the body of water is not actually supportive or remorseless, but rather becomes a vehicle for Mrs. Ramsay to make sense of her own emotional state.) Woolf takes the pathetic fallacy out of an isolated moment and instead makes it the subject of longer musings by different characters throughout the text: she exposes and complicates the term by making Mrs. Ramsay aware of the fact that her perceptions of the ocean change depending on her mood and state of mind.

In Mrs. Ramsay's specific case, the emotional significance of the waves depends on whether they are accompanied by a "task." When she is preoccupied in her own endeavors, fulfilling her maternal role, their largeness is soothing. When, on the other hand, she can focus fully on their existential "measure of life," she becomes more philosophical and worries about the smallness, the "ephemeral" quality of her life in comparison to the ocean's scale. Thus we can see Mrs. Ramsay's character as one who finds significance and peace in her tasks—one for whom the ocean brings solace to contextualize those tasks, but if focused on solely, will unleash an abstract anxiety about time and meaning.

The Window, 4 Quotes

❝ Then beneath the colour there was the shape. She could see it all so clearly, so commandingly, when she looked: it was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing changed. It was in that moment's flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child.

Related Characters: Lily Briscoe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

As Lily Briscoe and Mr. Bankes prepare to take a walk, Lily looks back once more at her painting. She reflects on her artistic short-comings and on the division between conceptualizing a work of art and executing it.

Lily differentiates, here, between different elements that compose the painting. She sees the surface being the result of "color" and below that the "shape"—not the shape in terms of the physical objects in the canvas, but rather the abstract idea that will be conveyed with the materials of "color." That she can "see" this invisible idea seems to indicate it would be easy to manifest in the painting, yet she finds the opposite to be true. "The picture" of her internal mind and "her canvas" of external production do not immediately connect, and, in the space between the two, "the demons set on her." That is to say, there are corrupting elements between the "conception" of imagining a work to its actual manifestation.

Woolf is using Lily as a case study to speak about the broader process of artistic creation and, of course, about this novel itself. Art, she explains, suffers from a fundamental disjoint between what we see in the world, what we can imagine, and what we are capable of representing. This is a subtle critique of realist writing—against which Woolf's prose responded—that had traditionally assumed that the novel should be a perfect representation of external reality. Lily's character shows that even in a visual medium like painting that equivalence of "picture" and "canvas" is impossible. This thus justifies and explores Woolf's idea that writing will similarly diverge from simply recounting events—due, in particular, to the "demons" that enter the writer's mind.

❝ ...because distant views seem to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest.

Related Characters: Lily Briscoe (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

On their walk, Lily and Mr. Bankes reflect on a beautiful view over the ocean. They are torn in their appraisal of the scene, however, because its serenity and enormity also gesture at their smallness and mortality.

Woolf is building, here, on the way the ocean can function as a symbol for the longevity of the natural world—both for the reader and for her characters. Lily and Mr. Bankes are notably repeating the thought patterns of Mrs. Ramsay as she had looked on the ocean, indicating that there is a common way that it is perceived. Yet their appraisals also speak to differences in personality. Whereas Mrs. Ramsay used a lyrical language to describe her own ephemerality—and sought solace in her household affairs—Lily takes a broader view and ponders the ephemerality of mankind: "an earth entirely at rest."

In this way, the ocean comes to be a Rorschach test for personality, in which Woolf's stream-of-consciousness style allows us access to a variety of different interpretations within various characters' minds. Furthermore, the passage calls us as readers to account for our own symbolic interpretations—for we are making sense of symbolism of the ocean in the exact same way as the characters. Woolf seems to poke fun at, or at least show an awareness of, this endeavor.

The Window, 5 Quotes

❝ For always, [Mr. Bankes] thought, there was something incongruous to be worked into the harmony of [Mrs. Ramsay's] face. She clapped a deer-stalker's hat on her head; she ran across the lawn in galoshes to snatch a child from mischief. So that if it was her beauty merely that one thought of, one must remember the quivering thing, the living thing...and work it into the picture.

Related Characters: William Bankes (speaker), Mrs. Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Ramsay is now measuring a stocking, but the scene has slowly zoomed out into first her own mind and then to an external narrative. Here, the the narrator takes on the perspective of Mr. Bankes to reflect on the odd constitution of Mrs. Ramsay's beauty.

What Mr. Bankes fixates on is the difference between an external beauty and a beauty constituted by internal character and by the action inspired by that character. This

is what is "incongruous" and what therefore cannot be explained just by a visual "face." And to make sense of this, Mr. Bankes cites more energetic and erratic behaviors of Mrs. Ramsay—stressing that her character is far from pristine and vacant. He summarizes this "something incongruous" as "the quivering thing, the living thing," asserting that while it may be odd in some sense, it also provides a source of stimulation and vigor. Indeed, it is the thing that makes her "living," that makes her human.

This passage speaks to the exact literary strategy Woolf employs when describing Mrs. Ramsay. Traditional, realist writing would only convey physical details and actions taken by a character, but Woolf delves deeply into Mrs. Ramsay's mind—as if she herself wants to render for us "the quivering thing." Indeed, Mr. Bankes' reference to integrating that quality "into the picture" stresses the importance of human interiority in art like that of Lily or Woolf herself. The text implies that pictures alone will mis the the living essence of someone, and that artists must remember to include this quality in their work.

The Window, 6 Quotes

❝ The extraordinary irrationality of [Mrs. Ramsay's] remark, the folly of women's minds enraged [Mr. Ramsay]. He had ridden through the valley of death, been shattered and shivered; and now she flew in the face of facts, made his children hope what was utterly out of the question, in effect, told lies.

Related Characters: Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Ramsay is infuriated by Mrs. Ramsay's supposedly irrational belief that the weather will allow them to visit the lighthouse. He defines a striking divergence in their personalities in which Mrs. Ramsay prefers niceties to facts.

Woolf's text does not lend full allegiance to either side of the debate. It may focus of the "extraordinary irrationality" of what Mrs. Ramsay has said and call her hope for a sunny day mere "lies," but this language is also being partially constituted by Mr. Ramsay. Indeed, his quick movement from a single comment by his wife to an overarching note on "the folly of women's minds" parodies how quickly people generalize small instances of human interaction. The bombastic language only grows more dazzling as Mr. Ramsay describes his journey as one through "the valley of death," making it increasingly difficult for the reader to take his comments seriously. By juxtaposing that rhetoric with his complaints on Mrs. Ramsay's lies, Woolf shows a certain irony in Mr. Ramsay's thought process: He is telling his own set of lies to himself—not about something like the weather but about the way he has conceived of himself and of his wife. Thus Mrs. Ramsay's concern for others is deemed no more false than Mr. Ramsay's own concern for his self-esteem. Woolf implies that though each one might set up a binary relationship between the two, each is also capable of committing the sin for which they criticize the other.

❝ To pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilsation so wantonly, so brutally, was to [Mrs. Ramsay] so horrible an outrage of human decency that, without replying, dazed and blinded, she bent her head as if to let the pelt of jagged hail, the drench of dirty water, bespatter her unrebuked.

Related Characters: Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Here Mrs. Ramsay responds to Mr. Ramsay's outburst. She offers the opposite opinion on the value of fact, arguing that the quest for the truth is only meaningful if accompanied by a sense of human decency.

It's notable how Mrs. Ramsay uses similarly inflated language here as Mr. Ramsay: Whereas he saw himself as having traveled through "the valley of death," Mrs. Ramsay describes him as a "pelt of jagged hail, the drench of dirty water." They thus both recreate their own identities in order to fit their argument. And if Mr. Ramsay's language was ironically untruthful, Mrs. Ramsay's is paradoxically uncouth. She complains of how Mr. Ramsay's can "rend the thin veils of civilisation," but her own sentence is similarly "wantonly" in that it is thought immediately without any self-editing.

Woolf points out, then, the disjunct between our logically formulated opinions and the way in which our immediate opinions are phrased. The split between the factual Mr. Ramsay and the courteous Mrs. Ramsay is only the tip of the

iceberg that obscures an entire psychic complexity within each of their minds. Once more, Woolf's work points out how radically differently people view their experiences and, even as we might construct a binary between the two of them (or between men and women in general), their internal experiences may reveal more commonality than first perceived.

"The very stone one kicks with one's boot will outlast Shakespeare.

Related Characters: Mr. Ramsay (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Ramsay is deep in thought on his own intellectual accomplishments, as well as the accomplishments of others. But then he suddenly relativizes any legacy, by comparing it to the immense scale of the natural world.

The question of scale preoccupies Woolf throughout the novel: often a character will be lost in their own thoughts until something external and belonging to nature gives them perspective on their minuscule human position. Woolf is not, however, simply presenting human affairs as trivial and meaningless, but rather putting on display how humans can create extensive meaning through their minds. After all, though a stone may indeed outlast Mr. Ramsay, his musings have taken up more page space in Woolf's text.

To reference Shakespeare also calls up Woolf's own accomplishments as an author—and questions whether her work will live on in literary history. Woolf's texts are filled with Shakespeare references—most notably in Mrs. Dalloway—so the allusion to the relative smallness of Shakespeare implicates a much-esteemed and personally-important author. Woolf thus explains how even a writer deemed essential for this very text will pale in comparison to the natural world.

The Window, 7 Quotes

"...the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly, again and again, demanding sympathy.

Related Characters: Mr. Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

James reflects on the moment of conflict he has just watched between his parents. He is unable to understand the deeper social context of what they say and relates to it as a violent ritual.

In this ritual, Mr. Ramsay is abusive, but ironically he is abusive not to punish Mrs. Ramsay, but rather to gain her emotional support or "sympathy." The image first takes the metaphorical violence done by Mr. Ramsay's emotional demands and makes it literal with the "scimitar." "Arid" can hold a similarly dual meaning as both physically dry and metaphorically lacking excitement. And though "smote" is primarily a term of physical violence, it also summons the term "smitten by" as in an attraction to someone. In these double set of meanings, then, we see both the actual emotional demand being made by Mr. Ramsay and the weirdly epic struggle that James envisions between his parents.

Woolf's language is, of course, far more verbose and ornate than that used by a child of James age. Though a child might imagine his parents as mythic archetypes, he would never articulate the concepts as such. This can help us clarify the perspective and position of the limited omniscient narrator, who adopts the perspectives of different characters but not necessarily their vocabulary. By maintaining an autonomous control of the language, Woolf is able to both point to the external reality of the events and the way they are internally processed by each character.

The Window, 9 Quotes

"[Lily] took shelter from the reverence which covered all women; she felt herself praised. Let [Mr. Bankes] gaze; she would steal a look at her picture.

Related Characters: Lily Briscoe, William Bankes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Just as Lily is preparing to criticize Mrs. Ramsay, she sees Mr. Bankes looking passionately at her. This observation causes Lily to feel a transferred joy on behalf of their shared female identity.

Her comments equates two types of gazes: those bestowed on artworks and those bestowed on women (by men).

Though she might have been liable to criticize Mr. Bankes for his wandering eyes, the pure rapture he feels makes Lily sense that there is something significantly aesthetic and meaningful within the beauty of Mrs. Ramsay. This parallel grows more clear when Lily decides to "steal a look at her picture": Now she and Mr. Bankes are both looking at the corresponding art forms that interest them.

That this gaze provides "shelter" presents it as more than a casual aesthetic moment. Rather, it offers a source of solace and protection for Lily, for it reaffirms the power of women to captivate men—and to serve as a source of beauty. If Lily is anxious about her ability to create pictorial art, this gaze reminds her that her very identity, like that of Mrs. Ramsay, can itself serve as a sort of artwork. Woolf again is straddling a complex and ambivalent account of female power: Lily feels "praised" by the validating look from Mr. Bankes, yet her thinking also implies that a man's look will constitute whether an object or painting is a significant work of art.

The Window, 11 Quotes

❝ All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others. Although she continued to knit, and sat upright, it was thus that she felt herself; and this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures. When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless. And to everybody there was always this sense of unlimited resources, [Mrs. Ramsay] supposed.

Related Characters: Mrs. Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Ramsay has now left James and reflects, alone, while looking out to the ocean. She observes how without other people or social responsibilities, she holds within her an endless range of possibilities.

The language in this passage describes two contradictory experiences: the disappearance of the self into invisibility, as well as the expansion of one's opportunities. Mrs. Ramsay first reflects on the difference between a social identity and a solitary one: The first is constituted by "the being and the doing"; it is large, visual, and auditory, and makes a distinct mark on the world, whereas the second is a silent, small "core of darkness." Yet that invisibility is not a process of self-abnegation, but rather brings Mrs. Ramsay into more direct contact with her own identity. And this identity is not a fixed sense of self, but rather is defined as the potential for "the strangest adventures," "limitless," and "unlimited resources." The passage implies that a firm sense of self is not necessarily defined by external actions and by fitting into a social network, but rather by quiet moments that actually open one's identity up into various possibilities. And it marks a striking shift from Mrs. Ramsay's earlier preference for distraction amidst domestic concerns, for here she feels most empowered when she is alone.

Here Woolf is building on a tradition in romantic literature that valued the solitary, brooding hero who separated himself from society to reflect on identity. But she takes that trope away from its epic context and places it within a home, in the small moments after putting a child to bed. (This also takes the romantic from the more masculine hero and places it in the "feminine" domestic sphere, to which women were often confined.) This is a striking statement on the ability of the human mind to create its own depth and reality: Mrs. Ramsay can think philosophically on the most serious concerns of identity with neither professional employment nor fanciful adventures but simply by employing her mind.

The Window, 17 Quotes

❝ It partook, [Mrs. Ramsay] felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected lights) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby; so that again tonight she had the feeling she had had once today already, of peace, of rest. Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that remains for ever after. This would remain.

Related Characters: Mrs. Ramsay (speaker), William Bankes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Ramsay breaks into this moving commentary in the midst of the dinner scene. Though she has previously focused on small human interactions, alternatively appreciating and complaining about the behavior of others,

here she sees the moment as beautiful and timeless.

This contrast between banal dinner interactions and Mrs. Ramsay's sudden rapture can be seen already in the first line. Woolf separates the sentence into "It partook" "of eternity" with a clause on the distribution of dinner meat, stressing how the aesthetic merit of the scene is the result of how a human mind frames the otherwise meaningless occurrences. What constitutes this merit, for Mrs. Ramsay, is the structural unity of the event: its "coherence" and "stability" that mark it more as permanent work of art as opposed to a fleeting moment. Again, this sense does not reflect any actual permanence in the events, which are far from "immune to change": rather, they have appeared to Mrs. Ramsay's mind in such a way that they seem archetypal and sanctified—and thus able to "remain."

The passage brings together a number of important themes in the novel. It summons the specter of human mortality by fixating repeatedly on the eternity of the scene: Mrs. Ramsay regards it with fascination because it seems to escape the laws of time that have preoccupied her throughout the day. That it does so by appearing to be a work of art reiterates the importance various characters have given to their artistic pursuits—but also points out that an artwork is less the providence of sculpture or painting, and far more the result of human perception. Through her vision, Mrs. Ramsay has transformed the scene before her into a piece of art that "would remain" and thus redeem any human triviality.

The Window, 19 Quotes

❝ And then there it was, suddenly entire shaped in [Mrs. Ramsay's] hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here—the sonnet.

Related Characters: Mrs. Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

After the dinner has ended, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay sit beside each other reading. The narrator recounts their vastly different relationships to reading, here focusing on how Mrs. Ramsay seeks an energizing progression to the climax of a text.

This relationship to poetry recalls what Mrs. Ramsay had previously found eternal and meaningful in the dinner scene: the way it was fully unified and coherent. For "the sonnet" is the stereotypical structured format of poetry, one that gives this exact sense of the "clear and complete." Woolf portrays Mrs. Ramsay's aesthetic preferences to be those that offer the reader this sense of solace and of "essence": Some arduous work is required to complete the sonnet, but at its end it is presented quite directly before the reader. Such a relationship to literature contrasts notably with that of Mr. Ramsay, who seeks the confirmation in text that he need not worry about personal achievement. So if Mrs. Ramsay looks for ecstatic unity, Mr. Ramsay hopes for affirming peace. Woolf shows, then, how these different characters' perceptions of reality also dictate their interpretations of and expectations for literature—a clever comment on how differently people will interpret her novel.

Time Passes, 2 Quotes

❝ ...certain airs, detached from the body of the wind [the house was ramshackle after all] crept round corners and ventured indoors. Almost one might imagine them, as they entered the drawing-room, questioning and wondering, toying with the flap of hanging wallpaper, asking, would it hang much longer, when would it fall?

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

As night falls, the novel's narration changes dramatically. The text no longer considers human interactions and instead muses on the behaviors of the natural environment and the passing of time.

Woolf anthropomorphizes the winds here, giving them human agency and perspective. The process begins when she differentiates "certain airs" from the general wind, thus bestowing them with a special significance. Next, these airs gain the ability to act in specified ways: they "crept" and "ventured," both verbs that imply an intentionality to movement. Finally, the narrator puts forth the idea that they may even possess thoughts and desires—able to be "questioning and wondering" about the physical environment like the human occupants of the house.

These descriptions are notably different from the earlier way that characters would attribute feelings to the ocean or lighthouse through the pathetic fallacy. For here we are not in a specific characters' mind, but rather that of the omniscient narrator. Yet the fixation is similarly on decay

and mortality, noting how "ramshackle" the house is when the wallpaper will fall. Intriguingly, these descriptions resonate with earlier worries from Mrs. Ramsay and others, stressing that there is a universal human concern with time passing and with decay. Even as the text zooms out into an omniscient perspective, this consideration is still the unifying concern of the book. The passing of time thus links the characters in a physical level, on a formal level within the book, and a philosophical level as a universal human concern.

Time Passes, 3 Quotes

❝ The winter holds a pack of [nights] in store and deals them equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers. They lengthen; they darken.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

The speed of narrative time continues to accelerate, and the narrator observes rapidly the passing of many, many nights.

What is important to consider in these passages is how strikingly different the images and perspectives are in "Time Passes" from the previous and subsequent sections. Whereas before, the slightest external event, the tiniest change in weather, could induce pages of reflection from a character, here an entire season of nights is passed over in sentences. The nights are deemed "a pack" as if they are cards being played out, which highlights how they dictate fate. But instead of pointing to the randomness of fate—which is how an individual person would likely perceive a night being dealt to them—the metaphorical cards are given "equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers." They are thus entirely uniform and consistent, never deviating or making special allowances. The final sentence reiterates this point by making an entire winter the result of just two curt clauses.

Woolf corroborates the earlier examinations of human smallness in the face of the grand scale of time. But here she positions these thoughts not in the minds of characters but in the style and images of the descriptive language itself. She thus moves from individual rumination on time to actually showing the way that human minds have dilated their own importance—which fades away in this broader narrative.

The Lighthouse, 2 Quotes

❝ ...there issued from [Mr. Ramsay] such a groan that any other woman in the whole world would have done something, said something—all except myself, thought Lily, girding at herself bitterly, who am not a woman, but a peevish, ill-tempered, dried-up old maid presumably.

Related Characters: Lily Briscoe (speaker), Mr. Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

During her interaction with Mr. Ramsay, Lily worries about her imperfect role as a woman. She feels that she cannot (and will not) placate him sufficiently, and is therefore failing in their social interaction.

This scene is written in direct contrast to the descriptions in "The Window" of how effectively Mrs. Ramsay could deal with Mr. Ramsay. She, after all, did not even require "such a groan" to know how to act, but could read his most minute expressions and shift her actions so as to best please her husband. Lily, in contrast, feels uncertain and awkward in the setting, for she has neither valued nor trained herself in these social arts. Her invocation of "any other woman," after all, recalls the way she had identified Mrs. Ramsay as a universal archetype of the gender. It also implies that Lily's self-critical speech is less the result of actually seeing herself as a "maid" and more that, in contrast to Mrs. Ramsay, she lacks the features of a traditional femininity. The passage, then, points both to Mrs. Ramsay's effect on structuring Lily's perception of womanhood—and to the intense void left behind by her death. Whereas the actual event was, when seen from a broad time perspective, quite flippant, here we visualize its intense social ramifications.

The Lighthouse, 3 Quotes

❝ But what a power there was in the human soul! [Lily] thought. That woman sitting there, writing under the rock resolved everything into simplicity; made these angers, irritations fall off like old rags; she brought together this and that and then this, and so made out of that miserable silliness and spite (she and Charles squabbling, sparring, had been silly and spiteful) something—this scene on the beach for example, this moment of friendship and liking—which survived, after all these years, complete, so that she dipped into it to refashion her memory of him, and it stayed in the mind almost like a world of art.

Related Characters: Charles Tansley

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

As Lily works on her painting, she reminisces on Mrs. Ramsay writing letters on the beach. In retrospect, she comes to see Mrs. Ramsay's behavior as its own type of art, akin to Lily's own painting.

For Lily, the aesthetic quality of Mrs. Ramsay's life comes from how she "resolved everything into simplicity." Much like a painter seeks to take disparate elements and unify them into something beautiful or meaningful, Mrs. Ramsay could bring harmony to social interactions. This memory does not highlight her active role in micro-managing such interactions, but rather refers to the way she would look from a distance and ponder human interactions. Lily at last understands the way that Mrs. Ramsay would, at times, suddenly distance herself from human affairs and gaze at them with an aesthetic eye—as she did during the dinner scene from "The Window." And if Mrs. Ramsay's claim that that moment would "remain" may have seemed silly or wishful earlier, the fact that Lily does recall it now partly proves her point.

"A work of art," the text implies, is not determined by the medium of painting or literature, but rather by the power and longevity of what is produced. As a result, a memory can become just such an artistic object, which serves to further democratize the process. Whereas Lily may have before held certain elitist preconceptions about what constituted art—and looked down on Mrs. Ramsay—she has here developed a more empathetic worldview in which she sees Mrs. Ramsay as an artist in her own way.

> What is the meaning of life? That was all—a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one.

Related Characters: Lily Briscoe

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

As she pauses from her work with the painting, Lily returns to this most abstract question on human significance. She wonders if indeed there is no such transcendental and abstract meaning and that significance is only located in small occurrences.

This rumination speaks to Lily's new age and maturity. Ten years before, she harbored more high-minded principles about her art and sought within it a "great revelation." Yet time, witnessing deaths, and a World War have narrowed her idealistic dreams and caused her to locate beauty in ephemeral and unintentional moments as small as "matches struck unexpectedly."

The passage returns to the question of scale that has preoccupied the text. Both the characters and the narratorial voice have often turned to the natural environment to try to make sense of life and to perhaps search for a "great revelation." Yet they are only ever moved to wonder about human mortality and insignificance, which denies the meaning of life instead of answering it. Woolf has instead located meaning in the smallness of human interactions—in the way Mrs. Ramsay perceives a dinner event or executes splendidly an interaction with her husband. This realization is part of why Lily has come to value Mrs. Ramsay—and it teaches her a lesson about art that Woolf has employed throughout the novel: to wonder about and expand the smallness of humanity is the source of "daily miracles."

> Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)—this was of the nature of a revelation.

Related Characters: Lily Briscoe, Mrs. Ramsay

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

Lily connects her memories of Mrs. Ramsay to her realization about the meaning of life. She concludes that the two pursued identical goals of giving the fleeting moment a more eternal existence.

That Lily defines "a revelation" as "making of the moment something permanent" reiterates the importance of eternity to the definition of meaning and artwork. It

develops the idea that significance comes from "daily miracles" but extends the earlier passage to claim that those ephemeral moments must somehow be stretched into "something permanent." Human life is thus not inherently aesthetic, but it can become so if a skilled enough artist can stretch it throughout time to create "a revelation." For Lily, this happens through painting, while for Mrs. Ramsay it is a matter of creating and examining social scenes.

As is the case throughout the novel, Woolf's use of parenthesis complicates the narrative perspective. Parentheses are often used in the novel to switch narratorial voice and to offer an alternative or broader perspective on the scene—or on a character's thoughts. Here, they directly link Mrs. Ramsay and Lily's forms of art, but it remains unclear whether Lily herself is defining the similarity, or if the narrator is doing it for her. The ambiguity is important because whoever speaks the parentheses is creating her own sort of eternal artwork: by linking Mrs. Ramsay's behavior to Lily's, the parenthetical speaker is herself defining an idea that stretches across time and across people and thus has itself "a more eternal existence." In a sense, that artist is Woolf, for she as a writer is the one who has connected moments across years, aestheticized them, and written them into eternity through the novel.

The Lighthouse, 5 Quotes

[Lily] went on tunneling her way into her picture, into the past.

Related Characters: Lily Briscoe

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

As she paints, Lily continues to ponder old memories, and here she turns to fantasizing about Paul and Minta's failed marriage despite having little information about the actual event. She notes that creating these stories in one's mind is an odd but necessary way to make sense of other people.

The description once more equates art and memory, here through a parallel clause: Lily is "tunneling" more deeply into her "picture" and simultaneously into "the past." She asserts that both have an element of consistency across time that allows a transient moment to become permanent, and both provide sufficiently solid ground for someone to "tunnel."

Despite its earnest philosophical intent, this is a slightly ironic comparison, considering that Lily has falsified the past by making up stories about Paul and Minta. Yet this is itself a similarity between "picture" and "past," for while both might seem to be objective representations of reality, they can both contain falsehoods or half-mistakes. Memory, Lily implies, is susceptible to the tastes and skills of the artist, just like a painting. Their significance depends not on the reality of the external event, but rather on how skillfully the painter or rememberer has defined the aesthetics of their internal perception.

The Lighthouse, 11 Quotes

One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, [Lily] reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought. Among them, must be one that was stone blind to [Mrs. Ramsay's] beauty.

Related Characters: Lily Briscoe, Mrs. Ramsay

Related Themes:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

Still pondering the relationship between her painting and the external world, Lily points out the flaws and biases inherent in any single visual perspective. She takes Mrs. Ramsay as her example of how people's identities cannot be so easily understood from just one point of view.

Lily's observation here is the logical conclusion that both art and memory capture a partial moment and preserve it for eternity. She wants to crystallize in that artwork the complete "quivering" essence of Mrs. Ramsay, but also realizes that this would require not just her own perspective on the woman but also those of many, many others. This wish to more fully understand the nature of people speaks to Lily's maturity, for she can now recognize that what other people (like Mr. Ramsay or Mr. Bankes) valued in women she had previously found rather banal. Lily concludes, however, that capturing a person in art is in an impossible feat. Human subjectivity will prevent her from ever forming a complete image—in either painting or in memory—of Mrs. Ramsay.

We should note that this is an observation that several other characters have had, even if phrased in different ways. At this exact moment, for instance, James is observing how the lighthouse can stand for many different things, and at the novel's onset Mrs. Ramsay pointed out how the ocean could be experienced as either calming or frightening. That this observation on multiple conflicting perceptions is

actually shared by many characters thus unifies them even as it articulates their mental distance. Woolf's novel returns again and again to the idea that people experience external reality vastly differently, constantly misunderstanding each other as a result. Yet by creating a common set of thoughts, images, and conclusions in their minds, she also points out a consistency in human nature that can provide the basis for mutual experience.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE WINDOW, 1

The novel opens in a summerhouse on the Isle of Skye with Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay, their little son James (who is cutting pictures from a magazine), and Mr. Ramsey's student Charles Tansley. The first words of the text are Mrs. Ramsey's reply to a question James has apparently asked about going to **the Lighthouse** the next day. She assures him he'll get to go as long as the weather is fine and James' heart soars with a joy quickly dashed by Mr. Ramsey's insistence that the weather will certainly be poor. James internally despairs for, though he thinks his mother "ten thousand times better in every way," what his father says "was always true." He could stab his father in the heart, he is so angry. Tansley points out the wind's unfavorable direction.

Forgoing the traditional, formal introduction characteristic of the Victorian novel, Woolf opens her novel mid-thought, starting right in the middle of a conversation. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's opposite answers to James' question position them as opposing forces embodying conventional gender roles: Mrs. Ramsay is nurturing and chooses her words to comfort the listener, while Mr. Ramsay speaks "the truth" without regard for the listener's feelings. Thus while James prefers his mother's company, he believes his father is a better judge of reality.

Mrs. Ramsay thinks how "odious" Charles Tansley is, but also how she chastises her children for teasing him and protects him against their mockery. She goes on to reflect that she is protective of all men "for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valour" and for their "trustful, childlike, reverential" demeanor around her. She has, despite difficulties, no regrets about the conventional domestic life she's lived. It is only when Mrs. Ramsay is silent that her daughters (Prue, Nancy, and Rose) are able to entertain ambitions of "a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other." When their mother is speaking, Mrs. Ramsay's "strange severity, her extreme courtesy" brings out "the manliness in their girlish hearts" and makes them "honor her."

Mrs. Ramsay's interior thought reinforces her conventional attitude towards gender: she embraces her role as caretaker of all men, even when some men (such as Mr. Tansley) act disagreeably. The role defines her life and gives it meaning. Mrs. Ramsay is so proud and comfortable inhabiting it that even her daughters—who want to shake off such conventional gender obligations in their own lives—can't help but admire their mother's graceful demonstration of womanhood.

Mrs. Ramsay reflects on Tansley's self-absorption, which is what makes the children hate him. She remembers having invited him to run errands in town with her and James after discovering him one day deserted by everyone else. She had reflected then on how petty her children were and thought about "real differences," the "problem of rich and poor" whose evidence she witnessed helping out families around London "in the hope that thus she would cease to be a private woman" just acting charitable to appease herself or sate curiosity, and would instead become "an investigator" of the social problem.

While her children find the most meaningful differences between people based on their personalities, Mrs. Ramsay finds the most meaningful differences between people based on their social stations. Even while Mrs. Ramsay feels content with being a female homemaker and caregiver, her hope reveals a secret longing to extend beyond the domestic "private" sphere and make a difference in the public world.

On their way off to town, Mrs. Ramsay asked the stoned Mr. Carmichael if he wanted anything, then flattered Tansley during the walk by confiding in him about Carmichael's failed marriage and intimating the superiority of the male mind and the rightful "subjection" of wives to their husbands. Tansley felt self-satisfied and tried to carry Mrs. Ramsay's purse for her, an offer she firmly refused.

Mrs. Ramsay invigorates Mr. Tansley by focusing on the superiority of his gender: he is a man in a society where men are always superior to women. Exuberant, Mr. Tansley wants to further emphasize this role by acting chivalrous. Yet even though Mrs. Ramsay dotes on men, she is no damsel in distress and can carry her bag on her own.

Mrs. Ramsay exclaimed at a circus tent and Tansley awkwardly confided to her that he had never been to a circus, having been born poor and financially independent since thirteen. He has always had the cheapest of everything and couldn't "return hospitality" in school. He rambled on about his future hopes for professional success in academia and Mrs. Ramsay, despite feeling sorry for him, thought him a "prig."

For Mr. Tansley, life is all about serious, intellectual achievements, a perspective on life that Mrs. Ramsay does not share and finds tedious. Again, Mrs. Ramsay is able to inwardly balance two contradictory emotions for Mr. Tansley at the same time.

Passing the quay where a bunch of artists are gathered painting, Mrs. Ramsay marveled at the beauty of the view then reflected that "since Mr. Paunceforte had been there, three years before" everyone was painting with gauzy pastel shades. She remembered and remarked to Tansley how her grandmother's friends painstakingly mixed their own paints and Tansley was unsure if "she meant him to see that" the painting being done before them is "skimpy."

The scene juxtaposes two forms of beauty: the natural beauty of the bay and the manmade beauty of the paintings. The former stays constant through time while the latter changes according to passing fashions. Because Mr. Tansley defines his own life through intellectual critique, he assumes Mrs. Ramsay must be making a criticism.

Waiting downstairs as Mrs. Ramsay visited one of the houses in town, Tansley realized "she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen," despite being over fifty and a mother of eight. On her way out, Tansley insisted on taking her bag for the walk back to the summerhouse. He swelled with pride.

Mr. Tansley is compelled by Mrs. Ramsay's beauty despite being unable to explain the attraction rationally. Carrying Mrs. Ramsay's bag, Mr. Tansley proudly demonstrates a traditionally chivalrous male role.

THE WINDOW, 2

Still in the scene on which the book opened, Mr. Tansley repeats: "No going to **the Lighthouse**, James," and though he inwardly attempts to make his voice sound nice "in deference to Mrs. Ramsay," she thinks him an "odious little man" to keep saying what he says.

Mrs. Ramsay's long memory of the trip to town takes up almost no "real time"; everyone is still in the same conversation that started the novel. Mr. Tansley echoes Mr. Ramsay's comment, eager to align himself with his teacher even if it hurts Mrs. Ramsay's feelings.

THE WINDOW, 3

Mrs. Ramsay attempts to comfort James by reminding him there is still a chance the weather the next day will be fine. She looks in a catalogue for a picture of an especially complex object that "could be cut out if James was very careful" (James is still clipping magazine pictures).

Mrs. Ramsay persists in her role as nurturer. She comforts James, as she comforted Mr. Tansley, by appealing to his ego: cutting out a complex picture will fill James with pride.

Mrs. Ramsay is suddenly alarmed to hear the sound of **waves** unaccompanied by the rhythms of human conversations and cricket games. As white noise behind human sounds, the waves seemed to "beat a measured and soothing tattoo and seemed consolingly to repeat…'I am guarding you—I am your support.' But heard on their own, elevated into attention, the sound of the waves inspire terror "like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly" beating out "the measure of life…and warned her…that it was all ephemeral."

The first appearance of the sea, which symbolizes the enduring natural world and its apathy to human life. Yet the human perception of this symbol shifts depending on the perceiver's context. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay feels the waves sound supportive when they are only the backdrop to human noise. Yet, heard on their own, the sounds terrifyingly remind her that the sea will outlast all human life.

Mrs. Ramsay realizes Mr. Ramsay has shaken off Mr. Tansley, ending their conversation. She listens for "some regular mechanical sound" and, "hearing something rhythmical, half said, half chanted," feels "soothed" and "assured again" and continues looking for pictures for James. Mr. Ramsay suddenly shouts, but Mrs. Ramsay sees that only Lily Briscoe is present to hear the outcry and thus it "did not matter." Mrs. Ramsay recalls she's supposed to be posing for Lily's painting. She reflects that homely Lily will never marry and that her painting can't be taken seriously, but she is fond of her all the same for being "an independent little creature."

The sound of the waves, too, is rhythmical, but Mrs. Ramsay is only comforted by a rhythmical human-made sound (the waves' rhythm just reminds her of the relentless rhythms of human mortality). Because she believes that the meaning of life lies in domestic caretaking, Mrs. Ramsay doesn't value Lily's art and instead thinks of her in terms of her marriageability. Still, Mrs. Ramsay's respect for Lily's independence extends beyond conventional gender expectations.

THE WINDOW, 4

At her easel on the lawn, Lily is irritated when Mr. Ramsay rushes by shouting, but is relieved he doesn't stop to look at her picture. Suddenly she realizes William Bankes is approaching, the one person in the house from whom she will not hide her painting. Lodging together in town, she and he have become "allies." They admire one another's good sense and scrupulousness. Under Mr. Ramsay's glare (for they have "encroached upon a privacy," seeing him shout), Mr. Bankes suggests they take a walk and Lily agrees.

Lily is shy about others seeing her paintings. The qualities that Lily and Mr. Bankes admire in one another give insight into the sorts of qualities they find most meaningful in life. Their relationship defies conventional expectations for male-female relations by being entirely platonic.

Finding it hard to look away from her painting, Lily considers it: she uses bright colors because she considers them more "honest," accurate to what she sees, even though pale gauzy pastels are in fashion. She reflects that however perfectly she can see the colors and shapes of her picture "when she looked," "it was in the moment's flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears," plaguing her with fears of "inadequacy," "insignificance," and inability so that, trying to render her picture with a brush, it requires immense "courage…to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast."

Lily paints according to aesthetic ideals that transcend time—she is concerned with truth and accuracy, rather than the current fashions. Lily's reflection distinguishes between having vision (the ability to see the potential for a picture) and technical execution (the ability actually to render that picture). Lily feels defeated because her vision is more adept than her execution. Lily's painting is so meaningful to her that, when it goes badly, she feels it reflects the inadequacy of her whole life.

Lily and Mr. Bankes walk to look at the water as they do each evening. "It is as if…the water…set sailing thoughts…and gave to their bodies even some sort of physical relief." The colors "expand" the heart. As they finish surveying the view, they are filled with sadness both because "the thing was completed" and because (Lily thinks) long views always remind the looker that the view is much more enduring than he or she.

Since it occurs each night, Lily and Mr. Bankes' stroll takes place in ritual time. The beauty of the natural world uplifts them even as it sobers them by reminding them of nature's longevity, how the elements of the natural world will long outlast their human lives.

At the sight of the distant dunes, Mr. Bankes recalls walking with Mr. Ramsay on a road in Westmorland many years ago and that Mr. Ramsay had pointed out a hen with her chicks as "pretty," which comment Mr. Bankes took as an "an odd illumination into [Mr. Ramsay's] heart." Mr. Bankes thinks about how, after that walk, Mr. Ramsay had married, had had children, and their friendship had worn out, so that "repetition had taken the place of newness" and the two friends only continued to meet out of habit. Still, Bankes is fond of Ramsay and sees their friendship "in its acuteness and reality laid up across the bay among the sandhills" like a young man mummified in peat.

Mr. Bankes and Mr. Ramsay's friendship occurs in the ritual time of habit: their friendship is no longer developing and changing, it's simply repeating its rituals for old time's sake. Therefore the friendship is like a young man eternally preserved (by being mummified) in his youth. By pointing out the prettiness of the hen and chicks, Mr. Ramsay gave insight into his domestic side, the part of him that wanted to marry and have a family.

Walking back, Mr. Bankes' contentment with his friendship to Mr. Ramsay is marred by little Cam's refusal to give him a flower at her nursemaid's coaxing. He considers the Ramsays, wondering how they maintain such a large family on so little money. He has privately assigned each child an English King or Queen in accord with that child's essence. He talks to Lily about Mr. Ramsay, thinking that his children "gave him something…but they had also…destroyed something." He remarks how "astonishing that a man of [Mr. Ramsay's] intellect could…depend so much…upon people's praise." Lily protests that one must "think of his work," which pleases Bankes, who frequently thinks of Ramsay's work and considers him a great philosopher (albeit one who did his best work in youth).

Woolf shows how vulnerable interior life is to exterior experience: Cam's coldness suddenly changes the course of Mr. Bankes' thoughts on Mr. Ramsay, even though her attitude is logically irrelevant to his thinking. Mr. Bankes points out Mr. Ramsay's greatest weakness: his hunger for praise. Because this need makes Mr. Ramsay so dependent on others, the need contradicts the conventional gender role of the strong male provider. Lily's protest suggests that the work a person produces is a more meaningful part of their life than their personality.

Lily is suddenly overcome by "her accumulated impressions" of Mr. Bankes and feels in awe of his fairness and lack of vanity, then suddenly remembers his pettiness about daily routines and feels at a loss: "how did one judge people, think of them?" Lily asks herself. She is overwhelmed by comparing Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Bankes until her thinking "exploded of its own intensity; she felt released; a shot went off close at hand, and there came, flying from its fragments…a flock of starlings." The shot has come from Jasper. Stepping back into the lawn, Lily and Mr. Bankes bump into Mr. Ramsay who, shouting again, ignores them and turns, "[slamming] his private door on them."

Lily is not sure where one should find meaning in life: she can't decide what part of Mr. Bankes' life she should take most seriously. Woolf illustrates the connection between interior and exterior life by showing how it feels to Lily that a shot in the public, physical world is triggered by the build-up of pressure in her private, mental world.

THE WINDOW, 5

Mrs. Ramsay has been knitting a stocking for **the Lighthouse** keeper's tubercular boy and, hoping to finish it in case they do go to the Lighthouse the next day, tries to measure it against fidgety James' leg. Glimpsing the shabby living room about her, she wonders what will become of the beloved house, which grows more and more rundown. In thinking about training the maids to clean properly, Mrs. Ramsay remembers that the sad Swiss maid whose father is dying in the Swiss mountains had caused Mrs. Ramsay to halt her demonstration of bed-making and fall silent by saying, 'At home the mountains are so beautiful.' "There was no hope, no hope whatever" Mrs. Ramsay thinks, and snaps at James to stand still. She sees her stocking is too short. The perspective begins to zoom out. "Never did anybody look so sad" and "…in the darkness…perhaps…a tear fell; the waters swayed…received it, and were at rest.

The scene demonstrates the simultaneously permeable and impenetrable border between interior and exterior life. Remembering the maid's words while measuring the stocking, Mrs. Ramsay's face assumes an expression appropriate to the memory. Yet, because she does not articulate the memory aloud, her aggrieved expression would appear, to an outside viewer, to be in reaction to the too-short stocking. The text's description of "the waters" marks the first appearance of the metaphor likening interior life to a body of water.

The perspective zooms out to consider Mrs. Ramsay's beauty, recounting people's curiosity about her as a person living behind "an uncomparable beauty" which she "could do nothing to disturb." They wonder at her sympathy and wisdom, and whether she has endured some mysterious tragedy to acquire it. Mr. Bankes found himself profoundly moved by her classical beauty when she was merely recounting a train schedule over the telephone. After hanging up, he'd thought about how, though Mrs. Ramsay was intensely beautiful, her beauty was always engaged with "something incongruous," such as "a deer-stalker's hat" she'd thrown on or "galoshes" worn to chase a child. Alongside her beauty, Bankes thinks to himself, "one must remember the quivering thing, the living thing…and work it into the picture."

Mrs. Ramsay's beauty is at once an invitation and a barrier. It draws people close to her in admiration, yet it also functions like a screen, concealing the particularities of the living woman behind its classically ideal surface. Mr. Bankes thinks of those particularities – Mrs. Ramsay's spontaneity, her spunkiness, her lack of vanity – as "the living thing" in motion behind the still perfection of her beauty.

THE WINDOW, 6

As Mr. Ramsay approaches the window on his march round and round the lawn, Mrs. Ramsay can see right away that her husband is in anguish, "all his vanity, all his satisfaction in his own splendor….shattered." She knows not to speak to him but focuses instead on James and, looking up after a bit, sees that Mr. Ramsay has come round again with his mood "veiled; domesticity triumphed." He stops at the window to fondly tickle a still-bitter James.

Mr. Ramsay's interior life is expressed clearly by his body: Mrs. Ramsay can see right away what he is thinking. Many years of marriage have taught Mrs. Ramsay how best to react to her husband's moods. Mr. Ramsay's anguish is evidently about something other than his family, since "domesticity" provides him with a relief from his pain.

Hearing that Mrs. Ramsay is trying to finish the stocking in case they go to **the Lighthouse** the next day, Mr. Ramsay swells into a rage, infuriated by the irrational "folly of women's minds." "He had ridden through the valley of death, been shattered…and now she flew in the face of facts…told lies." He stamps and says, "Damn you," to his wife. Mrs. Ramsay is shocked to silence: "to pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people's feelings…was to her…an outrage of human decency." Then, after a moment, Mr. Ramsay offers to go check with the Coastguards and Mrs. Ramsay feels he is the most admirable person she knows.

This spat reveals Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's different perspectives on life's meaning. For Mr. Ramsay, the meaning of life lies in reason and facts and he is thus furious with his wife for acting irrationally. For Mrs. Ramsay, the meaning of life lies in human relationships and she is thus astonished that Mr. Ramsay could so ignore James' feelings. By offering to check on the weather, Mr. Ramsay makes peace in the marriage by suppressing his own certainty in the forecast and conceding to Mrs. Ramsay's hope that it could be a fine day after all, and yet ultimately Mr. Ramsay will rely on the true fact of the forecast.

Mr. Ramsay strides off again, repeating his phrase, though now it sounds to him "changed" and he hums it, then drops it altogether. Mrs. Ramsay smiles, listening. The vague shape of his wife and child at the window "fortified him and consecrated his effort" to solve the problem he's contemplating. If thought were an alphabet, his "splendid mind" had reached Q. He is trying to reach R and, thinking onwards, his thought vacillates between extremes: he is proud at having reached Q (which so few people do) and confident in his role as patriarch (who protects his wife and children), and simultaneously self-doubting and crushed by the fear of other people whispering about his failure.

Though Mr. Ramsay believes the meaning of life lies in fact and rational thinking, he is most comforted by the human relationships that can so effectively alter his bad moods (as they have "changed" his phrase). As Mr. Ramsay thinks about thought, the motions of his mind reveal the contradictions inherent in interior life: he is at once boldly confident and utterly intimidated.

The text zooms out and compares him to the leader of a polar expedition who, having resolved to freeze to death, still squares his shoulders so as to be discovered later in the posture of a hero. The text asks: "who will not secretly rejoice when the hero puts his armour off, and halts by the window and gazes at his wife and son…who will blame him if he does homage to the beauty of the world?"

The metaphor suggests that Mr. Ramsay tries to conceal his weaknesses under a façade of heroic strength. The question suggests that most people ultimately value love and beauty over strength and heroism, even if they pretend otherwise.

THE WINDOW, 7

James resents his father for interrupting him and his mother, hating "the twang and twitter of [Mr. Ramsay's] emotion" which interrupted "the perfect simplicity and good sense of his relationship with [Mrs. Ramsay]" and draws his mother's attention away from him. James feels his parents' chit-chat as a primordial ceremony in which "the arid scimitar of the male…smote mercilessly, again and again, demanding sympathy" from his mother who, in turn, wordlessly assured his father of "her capacity to surround and protect," devoting herself so completely to such assurances that there was "scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by." Satisfied, Mr. Ramsay left and James immediately feels his mother "fold herself together," exhausted, though throbbing with "the rapture of successful creation."

As a child too young to understand romantic love, James sees his parents' relationship as a raw exchange unsweetened by the comforts that Mrs. Ramsay derives from marital love. He views their interaction in brutal, mythic terms, so that his parents' individual personalities are extinguished and they become pure archetypes: the male and the female. James sees his father's neediness for praise as a violent weapon crushing his mother. Yet Mrs. Ramsay herself emerges from the interaction feeling enraptured, if rather tired.

Mrs. Ramsay feels in perfect sync with Mr. Ramsay as he walks away, though the joy of it is tempered by her exhaustion and a discomfort she tries to suppress: "she did not like, even for a second, to feel finer than her husband," or to feel that people around them think he is dependent on her (rather than she on him), since he is, she knows, so much more important than she is. She is also disturbed by having "to hide small daily things" from him like the price of mending the greenhouse. Further, she is worried that he might perceive her suspicion that his last book was not his best (an impression she "gathered" from Mr. Bankes).

Though Mrs. Ramsay takes immense pleasure in her marriage, she wants herself and her husband to fit the conventional gender stereotypes for wife and husband. As the husband, Mr. Ramsay should be the all-powerful and infallible head of the household. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay feels disturbed by his dependence on her and on his inability to confront household problems, even as she exults in her ability to care for him.

Mr. Carmichael trudges by in his slippers outside just as Mrs. Ramsay is painfully considering "the inadequacy of human relationships, that the most perfect was flawed" and "some demon in her" makes her ask as he passes, "Going indoors, Mr. Carmichael?"

Mrs. Ramsay's quip reveals the link between interior and exterior life: her outward cheekiness towards Mr. Carmichael is in fact spurred by interior thoughts that have nothing to do with him.

THE WINDOW, 8

Mrs. Ramsay considers Mr. Carmichael who has been coming to the summerhouse every summer for years and still doesn't trust her. She blames his wariness on his cruel ex-wife. Still, his behavior hurts her, and "her own beauty [becomes] present to her" as she reflects that she is *usually* liked so well by everyone, that all kinds of people admire her and seek her out for her consoling, sympathetic spirit. Yet she recognizes, too, that she is not only hurt by Mr. Carmichael's wariness of her, she is troubled by what that hurt suggests: that her desire to be warm and giving towards people is only vanity, and more a desire to be wanted than a desire to help. Then, telling herself that she is, after all, no longer such a beauty, she returns to focusing on the story of the Fisherman and his Wife that she is reading to James.

As usual, Mrs. Ramsay's protectiveness towards men makes her blame Mr. Carmichael's failed marriage on his wife. Mrs. Ramsay likes to think of herself as a sympathetic do-gooder admired for her warm generosity, but Mr. Carmichael's wariness towards her challenges that self-image. It makes her wonder whether her life's aspiration to be kind and helpful is in fact a selfish hunger for praise (which would then bear a similarity to Mr. Ramsay).

Mr. Ramsay passes the window just as Mrs. Ramsay reads about the Fisherman reluctantly going out to **sea**, thinking 'it is not right' and yet going. Mr. Ramsay nods and continues on the lawn, contemplating, after remembering a newspaper article on Shakespeare's house, whether Shakespeare and, by extension, all great men are necessary to civilization. Disgusted by the possibility that "the greatest good" depends upon "a slave class," Mr. Ramsay resolves to "argue that the world exists for the average human being," that art is a superfluous decoration incapable of conveying life's essence. He thinks how he will have to collect his thoughts in time to lecture at Cardiff next month.

The story Mrs. Ramsay is reading James uncannily mirrors Mr. Ramsay, who is walking with mixed feelings towards the ocean. Though Mr. Ramsay often seems to want to be a great man himself, he is much more democratic in his thinking, planning to argue for the good of the common man rather than for that of the refined genius. In Mr. Ramsay's mind, art is nothing but a kind of pretty little doily placed on top of life without actually participating in life itself.

He walks to the edge of the lawn and looks out at **the sea**. The perspective zooms out to observe that it was Mr. Ramsay's destiny, "whether he wished it or not, to…stand…alone…facing the dark of human ignorance, how we know nothing and the sea eats away the ground we stand on." There, he retains only his intensity of mind, all fame and personality stripped from him. He is likened to the marking "stake driven into the bed of a channel" which onlookers observe from their own distant positions of safety with gratitude "for the duty it has taken upon itself" of marking.

Despite Mr. Ramsay's self-doubt and neediness for praise, the text suggests that the real meaning of his life lies in his ability to totally disconnect from his own ego and personality and become a pillar of strength facing the sea, whose dark chaos symbolizes the terrors of human ignorance and mortality.


Murmuring that "the father of eight children has no choice—," Mr. Ramsay turns back to look at Mrs. Ramsay and James. He admits he is "for the most part happy," in his family, in the prospect of talking "'some nonsense'" in Cardiff. The perspective zooms out to note the disguise of the phrase 'some nonsense,' in which Mr. Ramsay pretends not to like the thing that actually makes him most happy. Mr. Bankes and Lily consider such falsifications "rather pitiable and distasteful," thinking how Mr. Ramsay manages to be simultaneously "venerable and laughable." Mr. Ramsay walks towards the house stopping now and then to turn and stare into **the sea**, then turn back away.

Even as Mr. Ramsay is capable of depersonalizing himself and facing the dark mysteries of human existence, he is also a husband and family man who takes pleasure in domestic life. Thus, he looks back and forth from the sea to the family lawn. Mr. Ramsay's instinct to pretend that his lecturing—which fills him with joy—is nothing but 'nonsense' speaks to his wish not to seem so hungry for others' admiration. Lily finds this anxiety pathetic, but notes that other parts of Mr. Ramsay are far from pathetic, are "venerable."


THE WINDOW, 9

Standing on the lawn with Mr. Ramsay striding about and Mrs. Ramsay reading at the window, Mr. Bankes and Lily discuss the Ramsays. Mr. Bankes laments that Mr. Ramsay isn't even-tempered while Lily defends his childlike self-absorption, calling it honest, undeceiving. She only takes issue with "his narrowness" and "blindness." Mr. Bankes,' thinking of his own empty house, suggests Mr. Ramsay is a kind of hypocrite, hoping Lily will agree.

Lily sees some virtue in the volatile egotism that Mr. Bankes criticizes in Mr. Ramsay: because of it, Mr. Ramsay never hides what he is thinking and always shows his feelings on his face. Mr. Ramsay's interior reflection on his own life's circumstances affects his exterior comment on Mr. Ramsay's personality.

Before answering, Lily considers Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, feeling it is only possible to discuss them when they are out of sight for, once one saw them, they "became part of that unreal but penetrating and exciting universe which is the world seen through the eyes of love. The sky stuck to them; the birds sang through them" and all of life's "little separate incidents…became curled and whole like **a wave**" carrying one and delivering one to the shore.

For Lily, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's marriage functions like a classical work of art: it invigorates the viewer's perspective with its energy and beauty and unifies the seeming chaos of life's randomness into a deliberate aesthetic shape. Yet if that shape is a wave, it is an image containing only the sea's beauty and rhythm without the sea's terrifying reminder of mortality.


Then, as Lily is about to answer Mr. Bankes with a criticism of Mrs. Ramsay, she notices that Bankes is gazing at Mrs. Ramsay in utter "rapture," "love that never attempted to clutch its object" like a mathematician's love for math or a poet's for poetry: a love "meant to be spread over the world and become part of the human gain." Lily feels hugely grateful for and consoled by Mr. Bankes' "rapture," exalted "that people should love like this." She, too, "felt…praised" by his gaze which was shared among all women.

Lily sees a link between the admiration for human beauty and the admiration for non-human beauty. She perceives in Mr. Bankes' gaze the sort of unselfish appreciation that other people have for non-human beauty (mathematics or art). Because his love is unselfish, Lily feels she, too, can participate in it, admiring the admiration and sharing its praise with all womankind.

Lily turns to look at her painting and is thrown into despair. She remembers Mr. Tansley's opinion that women can neither paint nor write. She remembers she was going to criticize Mrs. Ramsay, and looks up to try to discern the specificity of Mrs. Ramsay's person within her beauty, whose "setting…was always…hasty, but apt." She recalls Mrs. Ramsay's vivacious insistence the night before that Lily and Minta marry, for marriage was "the best of life." Lily had felt her own unmarried life caring for her father and "even, had she dared to say it,…painting" rendered smaller and sadder by Mrs. Ramsay's insistence. She had laid her head in Mrs. Ramsay's lap and yearned to be made one with Mrs. Ramsay by the force of love so that all of Mrs. Ramsay's private knowledge and wisdom could be shared by her too.

By referring to its "setting," Lily describes Mrs. Ramsay's beauty as if it were a piece of jewelry or an artwork (a manmade beauty). For Mrs. Ramsay, the meaning of life lies in marriage, procreation, and homemaking. But Lily feels her own life belittled by this perspective and is unsure whether she can find meaning in the thing she so values: her painting. Bewildered, Lily longs for Mrs. Ramsay's confidence about life's meaning.

Lily braces herself as Mr. Bankes turns to examine her painting, feeling that he is seeing "the residue of her thirty-three years, the deposit of each day's living, mixed with something more secret than she had ever spoken or shown." He asks her about the abstraction and shadows and Lily explains that it is both "of" and "not of" Mrs. Ramsay and James, talking about the painting in terms of form. To her delight, Mr. Bankes is genuinely interested and she fills with gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay "and the house and the place" for the sudden "exhilarating" feeling of companionship with Mr. Bankes.

For Lily, art is integrally related to life—she sees her entire existence embodied in her painting. Lily's explanation of her painting describes the middle ground inhabited by art: an artwork seeks to loyally represent life while it also seeks to transform that representation into something new. Lily is delighted that she can share her interior life with Mr. Bankes and that he seems to understand and appreciate it.

THE WINDOW, 10

Cam races by Lily, Mr. Bankes, and Mr. Ramsay on the lawn and only stops after Mrs. Ramsay calls to her twice to send her to ask Mildred the cook if Andrew, Minta Doyle, and Paul Rayley have returned. Hearing back from Cam that they have still not, Mrs. Ramsay surmises that Paul must have proposed to Minta as she's been hoping he would. She loves Minta and knows Paul is not very intelligent, but in her opinion "boobies" were vastly superior to "clever men who wrote dissertations." All along, Mrs. Ramsay continues reading the story of the Fisherman and his Wife to James, in which the wife, frustrated that the Fisherman does not want to be king, announces she will become king herself.

Mrs. Ramsay is an eager matchmaker and makes matches based on her own understanding of happiness. Thus, she has set Minta up with a man that she herself would enjoy, without being certain that Minta will share her opinion. Mrs. Ramsay's interior thought is mirrored by the story she reads in exterior life: by orchestrating the marriages of those around her, Mrs. Ramsay evinces some of the same desire for power expressed by the Fisherman's wife.

Mrs. Ramsay tries and fails to remember if Nancy had gone along with Andrew, Minta, and Paul. She thinks that if Minta has refused Paul, she "would have to speak seriously" to her, for she couldn't just keep going on walks with young men even if Nancy had indeed accompanied them. Mrs. Ramsay then thinks of Minta's stuck-up, priggish parents (whom Mrs. Ramsay calls the Owl and the Poker) from whom she felt she had rescued the tomboyish, spirited Minta. But Mrs. Ramsay also recalls once being accused by a woman of "'robbing her of her daughter's affections'" and thinks of being criticized for being bossy, interfering. She thinks these criticisms "most unjust" for she cannot help her own beauty and certainly does not pamper it. She thinks she is more "domineering" about "hospitals and drains and the dairy," though she hardly has the time to do much about them.

From Mrs. Ramsay's perspective, she has generously "rescued" Minta from an oppressive environment and given her space to be the sort of spirited woman Mrs. Ramsay admires. Yet, though she doesn't want to believe them, Mrs. Ramsay knows that others might see this generosity as selfishness. as robbing Minta's mother of her daughter's admiration. Yet Mrs. Ramsay is able to push the threat of this other perspective aside and to restore her thoughts to the image of herself she prefers.

Mrs. Ramsay looks at James and wishes he and Cam could stay their age forever. She thinks of each of her children with love, and feels she would not care what people said about her as long as she was carrying a child. Kissing James' head, she thinks "he will never be so happy again," then tries to stop the thought, remembering that this observation of hers has often infuriated Mr. Ramsay, who accuses her of pessimism. "Still, it was true." Though "it was odd" that, for all Mr. Ramsay's "gloom and desperation he was happier, more hopeful" than she. She attributes this to his being "less exposed to human worries" and always having his work to turn to.

Because Mrs. Ramsay believes the meaning of life is family, she spends more time observing human relationships and is thus a better judge of human nature than her husband. What Mr. Ramsay calls 'pessimism' is realism—Mrs. Ramsay knows how unique childhood happiness is. Mr. Ramsay doesn't pay attention to the deep sorrows of human experience and is thus "more hopeful." Yet, ever the deferential wife, Mrs. Ramsay tries to revise her view for her husband's benefit.

Mrs. Ramsay does not think she is a pessimist, "only she thought life--...Life: she thought but she did not finish her thought." She has "a clear sense of [life] there" and feels her relationship to it to be a "transaction" that life is always trying to get the better of her, despite "great reconciliation scenes," it was "terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you." She thinks of suffering and mortality and how she doesn't want her children to grow up. But she quickly shakes off this feeling, assuring herself the children "will be perfectly happy." Then she wonders if she is too forceful, encouraging people to marry and have children, and wonders if she has pressured Minta. Finishing the story, she watches James and sees he is about to ask about **the Lighthouse** when taken to bed by Mildred. Mrs. Ramsay thinks he will remember the disappointment of not going to the Lighthouse "all his life."

What Mrs. Ramsay here refers to as "life" could also be called "time"—the omnipresent fact of it that proceeds mechanically and without regard for human life. It ages children and robs them of happiness. It threatens death at every moment. From this perspective, Mrs. Ramsay is not so sure she's right to encourage everyone to marry and bring more children into the world. She doesn't trivialize children's emotions. Instead, Mrs. Ramsay understands that James' childhood sadness has the potential to be eternalized in memory and that the sorrow will therefore live inside him for the rest of his life.

THE WINDOW, 11

With James gone, Mrs. Ramsay relishes being alone. Her whole being "shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others" and experience starts to seem gloriously "limitless." She imagines everyone must have "this sense of unlimited resources" in solitude and imagines them saying, "the things you know us by are simply childish. Beneath it all is dark…unfathomably deep." Alone without "personality," she is free of "fret, the hurry, the stir," and feels triumphant. Looking at the world at such times she "became the thing she looked at," and at this moment feels herself one with **the Lighthouse**.

Alone and thus free of a social context to define her, Mrs. Ramsay feels excitingly shapeless and invisible. She feels unlimited by external expectations and feels her deepest self (and by extension everyone's deepest self) is capable of anything. This portrait of the interior self combines contradictory qualities: it is shrunken to the point of being invisible and expanded to encompass "unlimited resources." As her deepest self, Mrs. Ramsay feels united with the Lighthouse, the symbol of human desire.

Mrs. Ramsay's mind cycles loosely through snippets of phrases, but when it suddenly alights on the phrase, "We are in the hands of the Lord," Mrs. Ramsey is irritated with herself feeling "trapped into saying something she did not mean." She reflects that she has never believed a Lord made the world and has always been conscious of humanity's senseless suffering. Mr. Ramsay passes by and, seeing her face engaged in this thought, sees "the sternness at the heart of her beauty." Her distance pains him, as does his helplessness to assist her and shame that he in fact makes things "worse for her" by being "irritable."

Mrs. Ramsay pointedly rejects the sorts of meanings religion ascribes to life. Her interior reflection on the inadequacy of religion expresses itself externally as a stern expression on her face, which Mr. Ramsay, in turn, interprets as evidence of his wife's distance from him and his inability to help her.

Mrs. Ramsay as always emerges from solitude by "reluctantly…laying hold of some…sound, some sight." She looks at **the Lighthouse** light and, still thinking how it is "so much her, yet so little her" and feels it is "stroking…some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight." She feels she has "known happiness…and it silvered the rough **waves** a little more brightly," and she is overcome with a contented joy.

Sensory perceptions of the exterior world help Mrs. Ramsay extract herself from her interior life. Still, the joy she's accessed through interior meditation extends out into the exterior world around her and beautifies her vision of the sea.

Mr. Ramsay, all the while, is admiring Mrs. Ramsay's beauty but resolving not to interrupt her, despite feeling injured by her distance. Then, Mrs. Ramsay rises and goes to him, giving "of her own free will what she knew he would never ask…For he wishes, she knew, to protect her."

Though he craves his wife's attention, Mr. Ramsay restrains himself out of respect for her. Knowing her husband's feelings just from looking at him, Mrs. Ramsay goes to her husband to comfort him by letting him feel he can comfort her.

THE WINDOW, 12

Walking together, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay chat affectionately about the household and children, Mrs. Ramsay suppressing her worry about the cost of fixing the greenhouse (protecting Mr. Ramsay from her fears about money) and Mr. Ramsay suppressing his anger and disgust that Mr. Tansley is the only young man who admires his books (sparing Mrs. Ramsay his self-doubt). When Mrs. Ramsay brushes aside the prospect of a scholarship for Andrew, Mr. Ramsay thinks her foolish for dismissing "a serious thing, like a scholarship." Still, they are in agreement about their disagreement: "She liked him to believe in scholarships, and he liked her to be proud of Andrew whatever he did."

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's conversation suggests that a successful marriage does not ride on total honesty and complete harmony, but rather on selective concealment and complementary differences. Thus Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay each protect the other from parts of their own interior lives that they think will upset the other. Thus Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are each grateful for the other's opposing view on what constitutes the most meaningful part of their children's lives.

Walking on arm in arm, Mrs. Ramsay sees **the Lighthouse** and, not liking to be reminded that she had "let herself sit there, thinking," turns to look at the town, thinking "all the poverty, all the suffering had turned to that" and the lights of town and harbor look like "a phantom net" floating in the place where something has sunk.

Mrs. Ramsay's metaphor blurs the boundary between interior and exterior life. The town appears to her a net to mark the place where her own thoughts of poverty and suffering had just recently been, though they have now sunk.

Mr. Ramsay announces that, "if he could not share her thoughts…he would be off," but wants to assure Mrs. Ramsay before he goes that she needn't worry about Andrew out walking and that he himself might take a daylong walk tomorrow. Disappointed that his wife does not protest this plan, Mr. Ramsay thinks back longingly to the walks he took before they married, then stops himself thinking he would be "a beast" to wish to change a single thing about his life. He thinks of his children with a sense of accomplishment, despite the "poor little universe."

Mr. Ramsay does not like seeing Mrs. Ramsay retreat into her interior thoughts, as she must have while looking at the town. Mr. Ramsay tries to comfort his wife about Andrew even as he tries to glean some comfort for himself in the form of his wife's anxiety about him walking alone. When he doesn't get the thing he wants from his marriage, he thinks back to single life, but quickly stops himself, remembering how much he loves his family.

"Poor little place," murmurs Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay is annoyed, thinking he is always just "phrase-making," saying "the most melancholy things" and seeming "more cheerful" as soon as he's said them. She thinks that "if she had said half what he said, she would have blown her brains out by now." She chides him affectionately, and silently suspects he is thinking, "he would have written better books if he had not married." Mr. Ramsay replies he is "not complaining," she agrees, he quickly kisses her hand, and she is moved to tears at the gesture.

This passage exemplifies what a wide range of thought and feeling can be contained within an ordinary marital conversation. In the span of a minute or two, Mrs. Ramsay experiences annoyance at her husband's insincere use of language, knowingness of his unarticulated interior resentment of her, and deep emotion in the face of his love.

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay continue walking and she thinks fondly about how strong her husband is, how he is extraordinary for being able to face such large, horrible notions head-on while remaining blind "to the ordinary things" like flowers, Prue's beauty, etc., which Mrs. Ramsay knows he acknowledges only to please her when she points them out to him. Yet Mrs. Ramsay reminds herself (in between observations on the state of the lawn and garden) that that's the way all great men are and that it is "good for young men…simply to hear him, simply to look at him." She sees a fresh star and wants to show her husband, but stops herself since he "never looked at things."

Mrs. Ramsay loves and admires her husband even though he is unable to find meaning in so many of the places she herself is able to. Still, the fact that he tries his best to pretend to see the meanings she points out attests to his love for her. Mrs. Ramsay, subscribing to conventional gender expectations, believes that it is right that men should be more concerned with intellectual matters and ignore the parts of material life that women notice.

Mrs. Ramsay catches sight of Lily and Mr. Bankes walking on the lawn and it occurs to her that they should get married.

Mrs. Ramsay is ever the matchmaker.

THE WINDOW, 13

Mr. Bankes and Lily recount the European cities they have been to and the paintings they have seen in them. Lily remarks that there is so much she still hasn't seen but that this is perhaps for the best as, seeing paintings just "made one hopelessly discontented with one's own work." Mr. Bankes protests, saying not everyone can be "Titians" and "Darwins" and that he thinks there would be no great men were there not "humble people like ourselves." Lilly wants to praise Mr. Bankes by saying he isn't humble, but stops herself knowing that he (unlike most men) does not want praise. Instead she says, "tossing off her little insincerity," that she will always paint because "it interested her." Mr. Bankes believes she will.

Lily is thinking about art through the anxious ego of an artist, worried that she herself will not be able to produce paintings as good as those of other painters. Yet Mr. Bankes is thinking about art through the calm perspective of an art appreciator, secure and unbothered by his own lack of genius. In Mr. Bankes, Lily sees a man who does not fit the standards she's come to expect from all men, and she admires him for it. Lily wants to project an image of herself as an artist free of self-doubt who thinks only of her interest in the art (not of her worries about it).

As she and Mr. Bankes come upon Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay watching Prue and Jasper playing catch on the lawn, Lily thinks "so that is marriage" and feels that "suddenly the meaning…came upon them, and made them…the symbols of marriage," as such meaning "descends on people" now and then for no reason. Then, immediately, "the symbolical outline which transcended the real figures sank down again," and left Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay just themselves. But in the moment of suspension, Lily feels "a sense of things having been blown apart, of space, or irresponsibility" so that everyone is spread far away from one another. This "spell" of distance is collapsed when Prue catches the soaring ball and Mrs. Ramsay asks her whether Nancy had gone walking. The question brings Prue "back into the alliance of family life."

Lily sees symbolic "meaning" as a kind of exterior and temporary quality that overlays certain parts or people in the world. Whatever it touches is lifted out of the realm of particular circumstances and into the realm of mythic archetypes. Thus Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay come to stand temporarily for the idea of marriage itself. The boundary between exterior and interior life remains porous: Lily's understanding of life as a kind of distant suspension continues as long as the thrown ball soars through the air, then is cut off when Prue catches the ball in her hand.

THE WINDOW, 14

Inside parentheses, the text shifts to the perspective of Nancy with Minta, Paul, and Andrew on the cliffs. Nancy had not planned to accompany the others but Minta's look had asked Nancy to go, so she'd gone. She is not sure what Minta wants. Nancy feels, each time Minta takes her hand as they're walking, that she sees "the whole world spread out beneath her," like "Constantinople seen through a mist," and that she is obliged before it to ask to have its unidentified features named for her: "a pinnacle, a dome; prominent things, without names." But the view drops away as soon as Minta drops her hand, sinking back into the mist.

Nancy confronts the mysteriousness of other people's interior lives: she can understand, without Minta having to ask her, that Minta wants her to accompany the walk, but she can't understand the motive for that want. Thus, Minta's desire feels to her like a concrete place (as in the metaphor of the city) that she doesn't recognize the features of (as she can't identify any of the buildings in the Constantinople of the metaphor).

Andrew observes Minta is a good walker and, unlike most women, wears sensible clothes and is nearly fearless (though she is irrationally terrified of bulls). He resents Paul quoting facts about the landscape and clapping his back, "calling him 'old fellow' and all that" which is "the worst of taking women on walks." Andrew is relieved to set off on his own once they reach the beach.

Andrew expects women to conform to conventional gender stereotypes and is therefore pleasantly surprised when Minta defies them. Andrew recognizes Paul's behavior as a performance put on for the women, and resents it.

Off on her own, too, Nancy imagines that one of the little tide pools is the whole **sea**, turning "the minnows into sharks and whales" and herself into some God-like "fantastic leviathan" able to dim the sun with her hand. Then, looking up at the real sea, she feels "that vastness and this tininess…flowering within it" making her feel immobilized for "the intensity of feelings…reduced her own body, her own life, and the lives of all the people in the world, for ever, to nothingness."

Nancy's game juxtaposes the human imagination of the natural world (which can be contained by interior thought) with the physical fact of the natural world (which is too vast and unknowable to be contained by thought). Compared to the immensity and longevity of nature, all of human history is just a fleeting moment.


Returning to the beach after a while at Andrew's bidding, Nancy stumbles on Paul and Minta embracing behind a rock. She is infuriated and she and Andrew put on their shoes in resentful silence, each irritated by the "horrid nuisance" and by the fact of the other's gender.

For Andrew and Nancy, still too young to have their own romances, others' romances are nothing but an annoyance and gender differences are something they'd rather not have to think about.

On the way back, Minta suddenly realizes she's lost her grandmother's brooch, her only piece of jewelry and most treasured possession. She begins to cry and the group returns to search for it among the rocks. They can't find it and, since the tide is coming in, they leave with Andrew and Paul promising to return the next day and Minta continuing to sob. Nancy suspects her tears are not entirely for the brooch, but "for something else. We might all sit down and cry, she felt. But she did not know what for."

As Nancy intuits, Minta's external behavior is spurred by an interior sorrow that she does not fully articulate, preferring to ascribe her tears to the lost brooch (the implication is that some part of Minta does not want to marry Paul, or perhaps to marry at all). At the sight of Minta's distress, Andrew and Paul take on the conventional male roles of protector and caretaker.


Walking back again, Paul boasts to Minta what a good finder he is and assures her he'll find her brooch, inwardly resolving against Minta's protests to get up at dawn to do so. "He would prove what he could do." He feels walking back with Minta that these moments foretold a life's journey with him leading her by his side. Though it was terrifying to actually propose, he is now eager to tell about it and wants to tell Mrs. Ramsay as he feels she's "made him" do it by filling him with confidence in himself. Approaching the summerhouse aglow in the darkness, he chants "lights, lights, lights," then catches himself, not wanting to appear foolish. Close parentheses.

Paul proudly persists in puffing up his image as a conventional male protector of women and imagines that his performance of this role will make Minta as happy as it makes himself. Mrs. Ramsay has cannily orchestrated the marriage she desires not by directly instructing Paul to propose but by boosting his ego. Paul's chant reflects his interior delight, but he checks himself for the sake of social propriety.

THE WINDOW, 15

Prue replies to Mrs. Ramsay that she thinks Nancy did go on the walk.

This sharp cut points out that the walk and the scene on the Ramsay lawn have been occurring simultaneously.

THE WINDOW, 16

Finishing up dressing for dinner in her bedroom with Jasper and Rose, Mrs. Ramsay tries to push aside an inward fear that something bad has happened to Nancy, Andrew, Paul, and Minta while outwardly entertaining Jasper and Rose by letting them choose her jewelry and imagining personalities for the rooks flying around outside whom she has named Mary and Joseph. She tells Jasper to tell Mildred absolutely not to delay dinner, laughing it should not be held even "for the Queen of England."

Unlike her husband, Mrs. Ramsay is an expert in concealing her interior thoughts behind her external behavior. As a conventional wife, Mrs. Ramsay is in charge of all the small decisions about daily household life, such as when dinner will be served.

Observing how carefully and seriously Rose chooses her mother's necklace for her, Mrs. Ramsay tries to think back to her own childhood, "some quite speechless feeling that one had for one's mother at Rose's age." Rose's gravity saddens Mrs. Ramsay, who feels she cannot give anything adequate in return and that "what Rose felt was quite out of proportion to anything she actually was." She thinks how Rose will grow up and "suffer...with these deep feelings."

Mrs. Ramsay's perspective on time allows her to relate to Rose's feelings (by remembering her own childhood) while also recognizing Rose's misunderstanding (by drawing on her experience of adulthood). Once again, Mrs. Ramsay fears for what time will do to her children.

Then, her outfit complete, Mrs. Ramsay invites the children to escort her downstairs. Catching sight of the rooks again outside the window, she asks Jasper if he thinks they mind being shot at (as Jasper shoots at them). Jasper is momentarily "rebuked, but not seriously" thinking his mother lives "in another division of the world" and just doesn't understand that birds "did not feel." Still, he asks her if she thinks the birds he shoots are really Mary and Joseph. But Mrs. Ramsay, distracted, doesn't answer him.

Mrs. Ramsay's words disrupt Jasper's own sense of the meanings in his life. He has not attributed any individual value to the birds he shoots, thinking of them just as toys. Yet his mother's comment makes him worry that those birds might actually have feelings, which would turn his lighthearted pastime into something brutal.

Entering the hall, Mrs. Ramsay discovers Nancy, Paul, Minta, and Andrew returned, and immediately feels "much more annoyed with them than relieved." She wonders what has happened but knows she will not be told just yet and passes them silently, bowing slightly like "some queen." The dinner gong sounds which means that everyone must leave all their private, separate activities in their rooms and gather with the others for dinner.

The fact of the walkers' return obliterates the fears that have been preoccupying Mrs. Ramsay's interior thoughts and makes her feel not relief but irritation at their tardiness. Ritual time in the Ramsay house is strict: everyone must abandon their personal activities in deference to the communal schedule.

THE WINDOW, 17

Sitting down at the head of the dinner table, Mrs. Ramsay is suddenly overcome with fatigue and hopelessness. "But what have I done with my life?" she thinks, while orchestrating the seating arrangements and beginning to serve soup. Seeing Mr. Ramsay frowning at the other end of the table, she can't believe she'd ever loved him. She feels her life is over, she's "past everything." She resents the "sterility of men" who leave all "the effort of merging and flowing and creating" of the dinner table to her. But, shaking herself, she begins the work of it since there is only her to do it. She asks Mr. Bankes if he's gotten his letters in the hall.

Mrs. Ramsay's sudden mood swing demonstrates the mercurial nature of interior life: she was relatively happy just moments ago; there has been no obvious incident that might throw her into despair. She feels time has passed her by. Mrs. Ramsay's usual indulgence of and admiration for men is shattered by her despair. Suddenly, she sees them as oppressive, needy drains on her own energy.

Watching Mrs. Ramsay, Lily notes that, asking Mr. Bankes about the letters, Mrs. Ramsay goes from looking old and remote to looking bright again. She is amused thinking she perceives pity for Mr. Bankes in Mrs. Ramsay's question. Lily thinks Mr. Bankes isn't pitiable, since he has his work. Thinking with sudden joy of her own work, Lily places a saltshaker on the table to remind her to move the tree in her painting. She resents Mr. Tansley sitting smack in the view in front of her and eating with "bare unloveliness." Still, she notes that "it was almost impossible to dislike anyone if one looked at them" and observes that she likes his blue eyes.

Observant Lily can detect Mrs. Ramsay's interior state through her facial expressions. Mrs. Ramsay likely pities Mr. Bankes because he is unmarried and, for Mrs. Ramsay, the meaning of life lies in marriage and family. But for Lily, who believes the meaning of life lies in one's own work, there is nothing pitiable about Mr. Bankes. Lily's painting brightens her spirits in the way that Mrs. Ramsay's family brightens Mrs. Ramsay's. The beauty of Mr. Tansley's eyes warms Lily's attitude towards him.

Mr. Tansley resents Mrs. Ramsay's yoking him into small talk about letters and resolves "not…to be condescended to by these silly women." He finds the whole ritual of dinner absurd and useless and thinks women are an impediment to "civilization." He "asserts himself" by remarking that they won't be able to go to **the Lighthouse** the next day. Lily, repulsed by his charmlessness, mockingly asks Tansley to take her to the Lighthouse. Tansley, infuriated at being teased and at being the shabby object of everyone's loathing, snaps back at her rudely that the journey would make her sick. Immediately he regrets speaking crassly in front of Mrs. Ramsay. He feels that even though he has long supported himself, helps out at home, pays for his sister's education, still all anyone pays attention to is his being "a dry prig."

Mr. Tansley believes that the meaning of life lies in work and intellectual achievement, and he therefore can't see the value of social interaction and domestic ritual. Because he can find no value in these conventionally "female" activities, he writes off the whole female gender as a worthless impediment to male progress. Still, even as he inwardly disdains the event and looks down on his companions, Mr. Tansley's sensitivity and anxiety about his own behavior at the table suggest that he actually takes the dinner ritual more seriously than he claims to.

Mrs. Ramsay is meanwhile asking Mr. Bankes all about the Manning family from whom he's received a letter and whom she used to know. She recounts her own memories and is delighted by all the details Mr. Bankes offers, somewhat puzzling Mr. Bankes. When Mr. Bankes asks whether he should send along her love in his reply, she quickly insists not as she and the Mannings have grown apart. Mrs. Ramsay thinks how strange that she has not thought of the Mannings all these years and that they may have not thought of her either. Mr. Bankes feels glad that he has stayed close to the Mannings *and* the Ramsays.

Mrs. Ramsay feeling of intimacy with the Mannings is based on time spent together far in the past. She feels close to them as she recounts her memories but knows that this intimacy does not change the fact of their distance in the present. Having to acknowledge this fact to Mr. Bankes leads Mrs. Ramsay to the uncomfortable realization that she herself may be just as distant a thought from the Mannings' perspective.

Mrs. Ramsay has to turn away for a moment to consult with a servant and, left hanging, Mr. Bankes is filled with regret at coming to dinner, which he only did in the first place to please his old friend Mrs. Ramsay (he usually eats in his lodgings). But, looking at her, he does not think the waste of time was worthwhile because here, isolated from his work, he is left to wonder sadly "what does one live for? Why…does one take all these pains for the human race to go on," "questions one never asked if one was occupied." Though when Mrs. Ramsay returns her attention to him and apologizes politely, Mr. Bankes politely protests there is no need for apology.

Mr. Bankes arranges his time so that he is always occupied in order to avoid the wandering thoughts that creep into his mind when he's left with nothing to do. Stuck at the dinner table with no activity to distract him, Mr. Bankes' starts to question the meaning of life itself. Still, his sense of social etiquette prevents Mr. Bankes from acknowledging any of these interior feelings aloud when Mrs. Ramsay returns.

Overhearing Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Bankes' expressions of etiquette, Mr. Tansley, having never spoken "this language" of etiquette, recognizes its insincerity and prepares to use it as future ammunition against the Ramsays. He can tell his few friends how tedious he found his stay at the summerhouse, how nonsensical their conversation. Still, at the moment, he flails, furiously trying to break into conversations around him to no avail. Lily notices "as in an X-ray…the ribs and thigh bones of the young man's desire to impress himself" but, remembering his sexist assertions about women not being able to paint or write, resolves not to offer him an opportunity to do so even though she knows it is part of "a code of behavior" that women must help young men assert themselves, as young men must help women in times of physical danger.

Mr. Tansley, who only knows how to perceive meaning in intellectual achievement, cannot see that the value of etiquette's white lies rests in their ability to protect people's feelings. Mr. Tansley does not articulate his internal distress but Lily can see right through his external appearance, as if he were being x-rayed. She is torn between the conventional expectations of her gender—which demand that she strike up small talk with Mr. Tansley—and her own expectations for herself—which want to spurn Mr. Tansley to pay him back for spurning her painting.

Yet, seeing within Mrs. Ramsay's quick glance an immense desperation imploring Lily to help her with Mr. Tansley, Lily once again must "renounce the experiment" of not being nice to young men and be nice to Mr. Tansley. Asking him earnestly if he will take her sailing, Lily immediately puts Mr. Tansley at his ease and he prattles on about his **sea** prowess while she thinks how the cost of Mrs. Ramsay's ease has been her own sincerity.

As usual, Lily finds herself constrained by her social circumstances and is forced to submit to the very gender expectations she so wants to resist. Mr. Tansley feels uplifted by the chance to brag about his skills, which he claims are powerful enough to handle the sea—the untamed unknown—itself.

Disappointed to find Mr. Bankes has lost interest in discussing the Mannings, Mrs. Ramsay feels "something lacking." Overcome by "the disagreeableness of life," Mr. Bankes feels likewise. They turn to listen to the others discuss the fishing industry. Everyone listening feels, "'The others are feeling [genuinely impassioned about the fishing industry]. Whereas, I feel nothing at all." Watching Mr. Tansley lambasting the government, Mr. Bankes hears in Mr. Tansley's voice a disdain for his own generation and jealously starts arguing with Mr. Tansley about politics.

As being stranded at the dinner table caused Mr. Bankes to question the meaning of life itself, so too does the awkward lull in Mr. Bankes and Mrs. Ramsay's conversation fill them both with a profound despair. The text demonstrates the isolation the can result from misinterpreting the interior states of others: though everyone listening feels numb, each person feels unique and alone in his/her numbness.

Mrs. Ramsay hopes Mr. Ramsay will say something characteristically wise and make the subject of the fishing industry something one can actually care about, as his words make any topic worthwhile. But, looking down the table, she sees Mr. Ramsay is contorted with disgust, infuriated that Mr. Carmichael has ordered seconds on the soup. "He loathed people eating when he had finished." Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay send "questions and answers" in their eyes, each understanding the other perfectly. Mr. Ramsay hates people "wallowing" in meals, but wants Mrs. Ramsay to note he has nevertheless "controlled himself" from an outburst. Mrs. Ramsay protests that he in fact shows his emotion "so plainly" on his face, where everyone can see. Why can't he hide his feelings? she wonders.

Mr. Ramsay, who believes that domestic rituals like this dinner are meaningless tedium, is infuriated that Mr. Carmichael is prolonging the event. After many years of marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are able to communicate their inward feelings without having to use words. Mrs. Ramsay, who is so adroit at concealing her emotions, is once again frustrated by Mr. Ramsay's inability to conceal his.

Mrs. Ramsay gets up to light the candles, pitying Mr. Carmichael for having to suffer Mr. Ramsay's visible disgust and thinking how she respects his composure and dignity. Knowing he does not like her only contributes to her respect for him.

Mrs. Ramsay admires in Mr. Carmichael the very qualities her own husband lacks: a calm composure and prevailing dignity.

Mrs. Ramsay admires Rose's arrangement of the fruit bowl, which looks to her like "a trophy" from **the sea** floor, "Neptune's banquet," a whole world to explore. She notices Mr. Carmichael, too, admiring it, as "his eyes…plunged in…and returned, after feasting, to his hive." She feels she and he united by looking.

Rose's aesthetic sense has elevated the fruit bowl to a piece of art. Mrs. Ramsay's metaphor is an apt one for art: like a trophy extracted from the chaotic sea, art can be seen as a beautiful form extracted from the chaos of life.

Mrs. Ramsay lights the candles and the light turns the indoors into stable, orderly ground and the outside into a watery space "in which things wavered and vanished." "As if this had really happened," everyone becomes "conscious of making a party together…on an island," united against "that fluidity out there."

The dinner companions feel themselves unified into an oasis of human meaning amidst the chaotic changeability of the literal and symbolic sea outside.

Paul and Minta enter as the main course is being brought in, apologizing for being late, and Minta can feel right away that she has that intermittent glow that she knows she has or doesn't based on how "some man looked at her." She can tell she has it from how Mr. Ramsay jokes with her. She had once been terrified of him but, finding that he enjoyed teasing her, made friends by acting "even more ignorant than she was." Mrs. Ramsay knows all about her husband's affection for Minta and all voluptuous tomboys like her. She feels not jealous but grateful to those girls for "laughing at [Mr. Ramsay]…till he seemed a young man," "attractive" and unburdened. For her part, "she liked her boobies" and has saved a place for Paul next to her.

Minta's gold glow unites the themes of beauty and gender: it is a kind of beauty that Minta can only perceive in the reflection of a man's gaze upon her. Minta finds it more pleasant to submit to Mr. Ramsay's conventional stereotypes about "silly" women than to assert her intelligence. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay both exercise a casual interest in attractive, seemingly foolish young members of the opposite sex. The company of these young people allows them to feel young again too.

As he starts to explain the cause for their delay, Mrs. Ramsay can tell just from Paul's using the word 'we' that he and Minta are engaged. Serving out the beef (which has been made specially for the occasion of Mr. Bankes consenting to dine with them), Mrs. Ramsay feels the special dish is also in tribute to their engagement, an event summoning "two emotions, one profound"—for marriage is a serious thing, "bearing in its bosom the seeds of death—and one lighthearted, wanting to dance mockingly around "these people entering into illusion glittering-eyed."

A perceptive reader of human behavior, Mrs. Ramsay can hear the inner significance lingering within Paul's speech. For Mrs. Ramsay, marriage is an integral part of life's meaning, yet she understands that this meaning is at once tragic and comic: marriage is tragic because husband and wife will eventually have to die, and comic because of the human ability to frolic and rejoice even in the face of certain mortality.

Mr. Bankes finds the beef delicious and praises Mrs. Ramsay, feeling, once again, that she is remarkable, wonderful, an object of "reverence." Mrs. Ramsay is pleased and energized by the admiration she hears restored to Mr. Bankes' opinion of her. She talks about English cooking and vegetables.

Here the exterior world brightens the interior world as the delicious taste of beef transforms Mr. Bankes' inward despair to happiness and appreciation for Mrs. Ramsay.

As Mrs. Ramsay talks, Lily observes how she is at once "childlike" and "frightening," how she always gets her way, as Mr. Bankes is having dinner with them and Paul and Minta must be engaged. She thinks Mrs. Ramsay puts "a spell" on people just by the force of her desires. She contrasts Mrs. Ramsay's "abundance with her own poverty of spirit," and thinks how Mrs. Ramsay "worshipped" love, the "strange…terrifying thing" with which Paul silently glows. Lily contrasts herself with Paul: "he, burning…bound for adventure; she, aloof…moored to the shore." She asks about the brooch and hearing Paul is secretly planning to find it first thing the next morning, asks to go with him. Paul chuckles in reply and Lily hears in that sound a profound indifference to her. She feels "scorched" by "the heat of love, its horror, its cruelty, its unscrupulosity."

As usual, Lily is not as confident in her own value system as Mrs. Ramsay is in hers. Though, earlier on in the dinner, Lily has taken great joy and comfort in her painting, she now feels small and insignificant compared to Mrs. Ramsay's sparkling charisma and grows curious about love, the thing Mrs. Ramsay values above all else. Yet, through Paul, Lily feels the exclusivity of romantic love (as opposed to the generous, publicly shared love for art): Paul's love is only for Minta, and Lily can take no part in it. Mrs. Ramsay's beauty seems to compel those around her into voluntarily obeying her wishes.

Seeing the saltshaker reminds her about her painting, and Lily consoles herself that she doesn't have to get married, and can be spared "that dilution." She reflects on "the complexity of things": she feels contradictory. She simultaneously admires love for its grandness, its beauty, its eternal desirability and disdains it for its dumb barbarism.

By seeing marriage as a "dilution," Lily expresses her own belief that the meaning of life lies in one's work. Indeed, a marriage—which distracts one from one's work—could from this perspective be considered a dilution. Still, Lily admires the idea of love.

Mrs. Ramsay, talking about milk in England, sees Lily's distance (as Lily thinks about love) and draws Lily into the conversation. Talking on, she observes that Lily and Mr. Tansley "suffered from the glow of [Paul and Minta]." Yet despite Lily's meagerness and pursed appearance, Mrs. Ramsay admires in her a spark no man will see—unless the man is much older. She thinks again that Mr. Bankes and Lily should marry and plans to get them on a walk together.

From Mrs. Ramsay's perspective, the homely Lily and unattractive Mr. Tansley are overshadowed by Paul's handsomeness and Minta's glow. Still, Mrs. Ramsay perceives an appealing quality in Lily (likely the independence Mrs. Ramsay admired earlier), though she doubts that appeal would be visible to most men.

Mrs. Ramsay feels suddenly that everything is, "for no special reason," right and good in the moment, a feeling that "partook…of eternity" and shows "a coherence, a stability," and something unalterable that "shines out" against "the flowing, the fleeting." It gives a sense of "peace." She thinks that it is out "[o]f such moments" that "the thing is made that remains for ever after." She feels it's the stillness "about the heart of things."

Mrs. Ramsay perceives the present moment at the dinner table transformed into an artwork: it has become an aesthetic form that endures beyond the fleeting rush of time it was once a part of and can maintain stability and beauty even as the rest of life flows away.

As the men argue about literature and Mr. Tansley aggressively flaunts his opinion to assert himself, Mrs. Ramsay feels her eyes effortlessly unveil the speakers, like light moving underwater so that the fish are illuminated suspended and quivering. As she sees and hears those around her, their speech is "like the movement of a trout when" the whole element in which he hangs in is visible. "[T]he whole is held together." Though she would, "in active life…be netting and separating one thing from another," she is now silent, "suspended."

Though water is often used in the novel as a metaphor for the chaos of the natural world and its total lack of care about human life (as in the symbol of the sea), here it is used as a metaphor for consciousness: Mrs. Ramsay perceives her exterior circumstances from the passive vantage point of interior reflection. From this perspective, the conversation seems an element in itself, a kind of water in which the dinner guests float, and her attention is a ray of light that illuminates each guest she looks at.

As the men argue about literature's endurance and legacy, Mrs. Ramsay can see that, while Mr. Bankes is unperturbed in his "integrity," Mr. Ramsay is starting to grow agitated, inwardly worrying about the endurance of his own work. The whole table feels tense "without knowing why." Minta rescues the mood by foolishly brushing off Shakespeare, which gives Mr. Ramsay an opportunity to laugh at her. Mrs. Ramsay is grateful Minta is there to take care of her husband's need for praise but wonders if that need is her own fault.

Though Mr. Ramsay is confident that work is the most important thing in life, he is not confident about the value of his own work and is, as usual, thrown into self-doubt when reminded of his own unstable legacy. Minta restores Mr. Ramsay's confidence by playing a fool whom he can safely feel smarter than. Ever protective of men, Mrs. Ramsay is tempted to blame Mr. Ramsay's neediness on herself.

When offered a piece of fruit, Mrs. Ramsay declines it and realizes she has been unconsciously guarding the beautifully composed fruit bowl, hoping nobody would take a piece to disturb the composition. But someone just had. Mrs. Ramsay looks sympathetically at Rose.

Mrs. Ramsay has unconsciously elevated the fruit bowl to the status of art object and sympathizes with Rose, the artist, when it is dismantled.

Mrs. Ramsay looks at all of her children and, seeing they are titillated by some mysterious joke, feels a little sad for not knowing what they are thinking. Their faces look "mask-like," and they seem like "watchers" elevated above the adults. Though Mrs. Ramsay notes that Prue, who has been looking with interest at Minta all night, is beginning to "descend" into the adult world. Mrs. Ramsay inwardly assures Prue that she will have love's happiness, too, that she will be happier than Minta "because you are my daughter," because "her own daughter must be happier than other people's daughters."

Though she is usually a perceptive reader of other people's inward thoughts, Mrs. Ramsay confronts the impenetrability of others people's interior lives in the faces of her children. As children, they are still removed from adult life and are thus, perhaps, less knowable than adults. Prue, who is on the verge of entering adulthood, is, by contrast, much more readable to her mother.

Dinner is done and Mrs. Ramsay swells with affection for everyone, even Mr. Tansley. She hears everyone's voices "as at a service in a cathedral," not listening to the words. She hears laughter, then speech, then Mr. Ramsay saying something she knows is poetry by rhythm and tone "of exaltation and melancholy" in his voice." (The poem is "Luriana Lurilee.") She thinks the words sound like flowers floating on the water outside the window. Though she doesn't know the meaning of the words, but feels she speaks them, articulating what she had been thinking all night. She knows everyone else must be feeling the same way. Mr. Ramsay bows to her at the last line of the poem and she feels him more affectionate than ever and is filled with "relief and gratitude," returning the bow as she walks through the door he's holding for her.

The metaphor of the cathedral reiterates that the seemingly quotidian event of dinner has been elevated into the grand realm of immortality and art. Even though Mrs. Ramsay does not grasp the meanings of the poem's specific words, she feels the resonance of the poem as a whole and finds that resonance to be a meaningful echo of her own mind, of every human mind around her. These words of the poem are compared to flowers (discrete moments of beauty) afloat on the tumultuous sea of chaos outdoors. The beauty of the poem makes the Ramsays feel the beauty of their own marriage more acutely.

Mrs. Ramsay waits for a moment on the threshold "in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked." Then, she exits and, even looking back over her shoulder, knows it is changed, "had become…already the past."

Even if a part of the evening partakes of eternity like a piece of art, the evening itself must flow past as all time does.

THE WINDOW, 18

Lily observes that as soon as Mrs. Ramsay leaves, "a sort of disintegration set in." She notes that Mrs. Ramsay is always rushing off urgently for secret reasons leaving everyone else behind.

Mrs. Ramsay's presence exerts an aesthetic coherence on the situation around her. She makes art out of lived experience.

Mrs. Ramsay goes slowly on the stairs, wanting to be still amidst "that clatter" in order to "pick out…the thing that mattered" and "clean it of all the emotions and odds and ends" in order to have it judged by her tribunal. Thus cleaned, "the event" (the dinner) seems to have always existed and merely been revealed for the first time tonight. The revelation "struck everything into stability." She thinks how she will forever be wound into the others' memory of the night and is flattered by the thought.

Mrs. Ramsay herself treats lived experience like a piece of art: she extracts it, then edits it, refining it into a shape worthy of preservation. By appearing always to have existed, her finished product appears to partake of immortality. She takes pride, as an artist might, in the piece of herself preserved in the eternal art object.

Seeing the furniture on the landing that she's inherited from her parents, Mrs. Ramsay thinks how "[a]ll that will be revived again in the lives of Paul and Minta and is filled by a "community of feeling with other people which emotion gives as if the walls of partition had become so thin" that everything "was all one stream," communally possessed, and individual ownership is of no consequence for "Paul and Minta would carry it on when she was dead."

The sight of her family heirlooms inspires Mrs. Ramsay to think of time as a cyclical, communal lifespan that repeats itself again and again through the ritual of marriage and is shared equally by all who enter its cycles.

Entering the nursery, Mrs. Ramsay is annoyed to find James and Cam still awake, arguing about the pig skull on the wall (which had been a gift to them and which Mrs. Ramsay had asked Mildred to remove, though it remains hanging): James likes the skull and wants to keep it up while Cam is terrified of it and claims she can't sleep with it in the room. Mrs. Ramsay lulls Cam to sleep by wrapping her shawl around the skull and cooing stories about fairies and gardens in which the skull is just a bird's nest. Mrs. Ramsay then assures James the skull remains there unharmed under the shawl. As she's leaving, he asks her about **the Lighthouse** and Mrs. Ramsay says they won't go tomorrow but will in the near future, resenting Mr. Tansley, Mr. Ramsay, and herself for stirring in James this frustrated hope that "he would never forget."

An experienced mother, Mrs. Ramsay is skillfully able to predict just what each of her children wants to hear and can elaborately describe two completely opposite realities to please Cam and James separately. Again, Mrs. Ramsay worries that James will carry the disappointment of his lost trip to the Lighthouse far into the future. Since the Lighthouse functions as a symbol for human desire, James' inability to reach it also resonates as an inability to grasp the objects of his desires more generally.

Mrs. Ramsay descends downstairs and finds Minta, Paul, Lily and Prue planning to go watch **waves** on the beach, a plan she giddily encourages, saying how much she wishes she could accompany them while feeling "withheld by something so strong that she never even thought of asking herself what it was." When she asks if they have a watch, Paul shows her his gold one and, in doing so, intuits that she knows he's proposed, that he needn't tell her. Mrs. Ramsay, aloft on her giddiness, inwardly thinks how lucky Minta is to be betrothed to a man with a gold watch in a leather bag and is then "tickled by the absurdity of her thought."

Still the eager matchmaker, Mrs. Ramsay is enthusiastic about the young people going off on a romantic adventure. The unnamed forces that keep her behind are, presumably, time and marriage: she is too old to frolic with young lovers on the beach and feels her rightful place is beside her husband. Nevertheless, Mrs. Ramsay's whimsical reflection on Paul's watch shows how lively and youthful her spirit is still.

THE WINDOW, 19

Entering the sitting room in which Mr. Ramsay sits reading, Mrs. Ramsay feels "she had to come here to get something she wanted." What she wants has to do with sitting in her chair by her lamp but entails something more, too, which she cannot put her finger on.

Again, Mrs. Ramsay feels inarticulately pulled towards the calm, domestic security of her marriage and towards the space in which she can retreat into interior reflection in peace.

Mrs. Ramsay observes that Mr. Ramsay is absorbed reading a book by Sir Walter Scott, which she knows he has chosen because Mr. Tansley said at dinner that no one read Scott any more. She worries briefly about Mr. Ramsay's anxiety about himself, but pushes the worries aside as meaningless. She has faith in him.

Mr. Ramsay's interior anxieties are, as usual, starkly evident to Mrs. Ramsey.

Mrs. Ramsay sits knitting and feels herself "sinking deeper" towards something she wanted, still not knowing what it is. Words from the poem Mr. Ramsay had recited at dinner "begin washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically" setting off small lights in her mind that seem to "[leave] their perches…to fly across and across." She murmurs the words of the poem as she reaches for a book to read: "And all the lives we ever lived / And all the lives to be, / Are full of trees and changing leaves."

Mrs. Ramsay's interior is compared to a body of water that she sinks into and that the words of a poem wash back and forth across like waves. Though she cannot articulate her desire, she feels it is connected to the resonance of the poem. The lines she murmurs comment on the constant change and ultimate ephemerality of human life.

Mrs. Ramsay begins reading feeling she is "swinging herself" from line to line. Mr. Ramsay reads Scott with obvious relish, "fortified" and freed of all the nagging worries that had built up during dinner. Now he feels "it didn't matter a damn who reached Z," for someone would even if he didn't. Finishing his chapter, he looks up to watch Mrs. Ramsay reading peacefully. She is absorbed in "climbing up those branches" of the lines, grasping flowers, ascending to "the summit" where she found "beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded there—the sonnet."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are invigorated by their reading and feel literature is integrally related to the essential meanings of life itself. Sir Walter Scott's prose lets Mr. Ramsay take comfort in and feel a part of a greater human project than himself and stop worrying so much about his own achievement. Though a poem's lines proceed in downward succession, Mrs. Ramsay compares the to the branches of a tree up which one climbs for the breathtaking, beautiful view at the top.

Mrs. Ramsay puts down her book and searches for things to say to Mr. Ramsay. They are both still dreamy, half-preoccupied by what they've been reading. She tells him Paul and Minta are engaged and he says he'd guessed it. She jokes, recounting her silly thought about Paul's gold watch and leather bag. Mentioning the engagement draws Mrs. Ramsay's mind to wonder "what was the value, the meaning" of marriage. She aches for Mr. Ramsay to say something, and feels the first tug towards despair. When he says she won't finish knitting her stocking tonight, Mrs. Ramsay is grateful for "the asperity in his voice reproving her" and agrees with him. She thinks "the marriage will turn out all right."

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay speak to one another more for the comfort of hearing one another's voices than for the necessity of conveying information. In this respect, their words are like the words of the poem Mr. Ramsay recited at dinner that Mrs. Ramsay felt resonate with her interior thought without fully distinguishing their specific meaning.

Mrs. Ramsay feels from Mr. Ramsay's look that he wants her to tell him she loves him. Yet "she never could," since talking does not come as easily to her, she thinks, as it does to him. In the past he's called her "heartless" for never articulating her love aloud. Mrs. Ramsay gets up to look at **the Lighthouse** through the window and feels the admiration for her beauty in Mr. Ramsay's gaze and feels him still wishing she would pronounce her love. She turns to look at him and smiles and knows he knows how much she loves him. She is full of joy. She says that he's "right, it's going to be wet tomorrow." She smiles knowing he feels her love, "for she had triumphed again."

The novel has just showcased a several-hour-long dinner party during which Mrs. Ramsay proved herself a prodigious talker, but that was small talk, social patter, and the kind of speech Mr. Ramsay craves is intimate, direct statement. Still, Mrs. Ramsay is more comfortable with the kind of speech that conveys feeling indirectly, as her earlier words with Mr. Ramsay conveyed their affection for one another without explicitly saying so. In the end, Mrs. Ramsay is again able to convey all she wants to without saying it outright.

TIME PASSES, 1

"Well, we must wait for the future to show," says Mr. Bankes on the terrace. Andrew, Prue, and Lily come up from the beach in the darkness. They turn out all the lamps in the house so that everything is dark except for Mr. Carmichael's room, where he is awake reading Virgil.

Isolated, Mr. Bankes' casual comment—presumably made to bow out of his political argument with Mr. Tansley—seems to describe the passage of time itself.

TIME PASSES, 2

"Immense darkness" falls over the still house. The dark is so complete that neither objects nor humans can be distinguished in it. "Certain airs, detached from the body of the wind," blow about the house "questioning," "wondering," "nosing," "rubbing," finally "desisting." Inside a parenthesis, Mr. Carmichael puts Virgil aside and blows out the candle.

Night upends the daytime hierarchies of human meaning by making people and their possessions disappear. In their absence, little fleeting bits of the wind take center stage and are personified by verbs usually used to describe animate beings.

TIME PASSES, 3

A whole autumn and winter's worth of dark nights pass, "full of wind and destruction." The trees are ravaged. "**[T]he sea** tosses itself and breaks itself." It would be futile for any sleeper to rise and "ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore." Inside a parenthesis, Mr. Ramsay reaches his arms out in the hallway on a dark morning and, since Mrs. Ramsay has died suddenly the previous night, his arms "remained empty."

As the novel speeds up and tracks the cyclical time of the natural world, human structures of meaning fall to the wayside. Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay's death which is, from the human perspective, an incredibly important event, is only recorded in a one-line parenthetical.

TIME PASSES, 4

The "stray airs" enter the packed-up house and meet no resistance to their "nibbling" at the things people left behind: furniture, dishware, old clothes, etc. Light on the bedroom wall is "a flower reflected in water." "Loveliness and stillness clasped hands" and together make "the shape of loveliness itself, a form from which life had parted." It is serenely undisturbed by the questions asked again and again by the stray airs ("'Will you fade? Will you perish?'"). The peace is only broken very rarely, as when a board creaks, or a fold of the shawl loosens. Then, Mrs. McNab tears "the veil of silence" when she comes to clean the house.

Vacated by the Ramsays, the house is no longer governed by human structures of meaning. Instead, it is slowly worn away by fleeting bits of wind and presided over by the lifeless beauty of light and peace. This new state is only disrupted by the return of human order in the person of Mrs. McNab.

TIME PASSES, 5

As she labors at the effort of cleaning, Mrs. McNab sings an old music hall tune which her voice makes sound like a song about grueling labor and fatigue and sorrow. She had smiled, seeing herself in the mirror, and started singing. Off on the beach, "the mystic, the visionary," is given the promise of an answer to the questions "what am I? what is this?" while Mrs. McNab continues her life drinking and gossiping.

Mrs. McNab still finds pleasure in a song from her past, even though the brutal meanings of her own life have altered the sound of the original tune. In contrast to the mystic, Mrs. McNab does not ask big questions about the meaning of life but simply lives on through time, experiencing.

TIME PASSES, 6

Spring comes and is compared to a "fierce" "scornful" virgin. In parentheses, Prue is married in May. Spring gives way to summer and the air is full of the promise of summer's riches. It seems that "good triumphs," "order rules." In parentheses, Prue dies that summer during childbirth. Summer reaches its hottest and the nights are short. Late in the summer one can hear "ominous sounds like the measured blows of hammers dulled on felt." In parentheses, a shell explodes killing a group of young soldiers in France, Andrew among them.

Again, the text's perspective privileges natural, cyclical time and minimizes the discrete events of individual human lives. Thus, three very critical events for the Ramsays—Prue's marriage, and her and Andrew's deaths—are relegated to one-line parentheticals. Even World War I is only acknowledged as vague, unnamed sounds in late summer.

Amidst the **sea** scenery, a battleship intrudes. Nature remains indifferent and "that dream…of…finding in solitude on the beach answer, was but a reflection in a mirror" and the mirror itself just "the surface glassiness" of peace and the mirror is broken. In parentheses, Mr. Carmichael publishes a book of poetry to unanticipated success. "The war, people said, had revived their interest in poetry."

Nature remains equally apathetic to human life in war and peacetime, but in peacetime, the text suggests, humans are more likely to misread nature's apathy as sympathy. Again, a major human life event—Mr. Carmichael's success—is minimized in a parenthetical.

TIME PASSES, 7

Nights pass and turn into seasons, years. The house remains, the flowers return and return to the garden. The day seems "as strange as the chaos and tumult of night" with the trees and flowers "standing there…looking…yet eyeless, and so terrible."

The text's sense of time speeds up even further. Seen from this perspective, even the familiar elements of the natural world are unrecognizably strange to human eyes.

TIME PASSES, 8

Having gotten no word from anyone about the house in years, Mrs. McNab gives up keeping it up. Before locking it up for the last time, she picks a bouquet of flowers for herself from the garden. She has heard rumors about the family's deaths. Seeing Mrs. Ramsay's old gray cloak, Mrs. McNab recalls a memory of her walking up the drive and lingers in the recollection. Then she locks up and leaves.

Time has defeated Mrs. McNab's dedication to maintaining the summerhouse. Even fond memories cannot convince Mrs. McNab to keep laboring at it. Her effort to collect the bouquet attests to her appreciation for beauty.

TIME PASSES, 9

For years, the house stands deserted. "The trifling airs…seemed to have triumphed" and everything is rusty, moldy, decaying, broken. Plants grow in the rooms and birds nest in them. Otherwise, "only **the Lighthouse** beam" enters the rooms. Then, Mrs. McNab receives a letter out of the blue asking her to ready the house right away, so she and Mrs. Bast drag themselves through the arduous effort of cleaning the house, rescuing it "from the pool of Time" just as the house is on the verge of slipping "downwards to the depths of darkness." In parentheses, Lily and Mr. Carmichael arrive by train.

Nature's cycles and human structures of meaning are positioned as opposing forces in a struggle. Though nature seems to have "triumphed," Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast end up pulling the house back into human order at the last minute. As the house is reclaimed for human life, time begins to slow down and the text starts to keep pace with the daily time of human experience again. The novel's two living artists, Lily and Mr. Carmichael, return.

TIME PASSES, 10

The war is over and peace declared. Lily falls asleep at the summerhouse listening to **the sea**. Through the window murmurs "the voice of the beauty of the world" calling sleepers to look at the beach, at the gentle, tender, soothing night. Closing his book, Mr. Carmichael notes that everything looks just like it used to. In the morning, Lily wakes up clutching the blanket as if it were the edge of a cliff. "Here she was again, she thought, sitting bolt upright…Awake."

Back in peacetime, the sounds of the sea are soothing rather than threatening. Once again, humans can misread nature as a beautiful mirror for their own aesthetic inclinations. Mr. Carmichael does not perceive the vast transformations the summerhouse has undergone over the past decade. Lily's terror suggests that there is something alarming about existence itself, even in a comfortable bed in peacetime.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 1

Lily sits at the breakfast table feeling how strange and unreal everything seems. Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James are supposed to go to **the Lighthouse** but are late and disorganized. Nancy asks Lily what should be sent to the Lighthouse and Lily finds the ordinary question absurdly unanswerable. Lily finds the strange unreality of everything scary but also exhilarating.

Because it has been so many years since she's been at the summerhouse and because so much has happened in that interval, Lily can see the summerhouse and the Ramsay with fresh eyes. Everything thus seems strange and unreal.

Avoiding Mr. Ramsay's "wild gaze" of "imperious need," Lily takes her easel out on the lawn in just the place she'd painted from ten years ago. She feels now that she knows how to paint the picture she'd tried to paint back then.

Mr. Ramsay remains as hungry for female praise as ever. Lily feels that the past decade has given her the perspective she needed to finish her long-ago painting.

Yet Lily is distracted by Mr. Ramsay's constant approach as he paces the terrace. She recalls how, when she'd arrived the night before, he'd said to her in front of the six children, "'You'll find us much changed.'" Then he had ordered teenage Cam and James to be ready for an early trip to **the Lighthouse** the next morning, which they consented to with obvious resentment. Lily thought "this was tragedy—not palls, dust, and the shroud; but children coerced, their spirits subdued."

Mr. Ramsay is as unable to contain his emotions as he was ten years ago. Lily sees grand, tragic meaning in the children's adolescent resentment of their father and their circumstances.

Unable to paint because she is so distracted by Mr. Ramsay's imposing presence, Lily thinks angrily that he only knows how to take, while Mrs. Ramsay had always given. She, Lily, will be forced to give, she thinks and, after inwardly lamenting the unfairness of the situation, she decides to get it over with and to give Mr. Ramsay the sympathy he needs so she can get back to painting. She tries to make her face assume "the rhapsody, the self-surrender she had seen on so many women's faces," including Mrs. Ramsay's.

As she resented having to submit to the expectations of her gender and make small talk with Mr. Tansley at the dinner a decade ago, Lily now resents having to submit to those same expectations in order to sate Mr. Ramsay's desire for female attention.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 2

Looking at Lily, Mr. Ramsay thinks she looks a bit shriveled, but "not unattractive." He likes her. He asks if she has everything she needs and Lily responds that she does. An awkward silence ensues which Lily tries to rescue them from with talk of **the Lighthouse**. Mr. Ramsay groans and sighs, and Lily inwardly feels that she is a failure as a woman not to be able to respond to Mr. Ramsay's obvious distress. Mr. Ramsay tells Lily the expedition will be "very painful," inwardly thinking her "a stone." The awkward silence continues. Lily thinks desperately that "a man, any man" would stop Mr. Ramsay from emoting so. But she has no idea what to say, as a woman, and can't bring herself to sate his obvious thirst for sympathy.

Mr. Ramsay evaluates Lily based on the beauty of her person rather than on the beauty of her work. Even though Lily resented stepping into the conventional female role Mr. Ramsay was hungry for, now that she is in it, she feels distraught that she cannot play the role more gracefully. Behind the mask of small talk, both Lily and Mr. Ramsay are suffering great internal pain.

Finally, Lily thinks to praise Mr. Ramsay's boots, which gives him the chance to talk at length about them. He bends to tie Lily's shoe to demonstrate a knot and, as he stoops, Lily is suddenly overcome with sympathy and grows teary-eyed. Stooping tying her boot, "he seemed to her a figure of infinite pathos." When Cam and James finally appear looking unenthusiastic, Lily feels annoyed with them for not showing their father more sympathy. Mr. Ramsay and his children depart for **the Lighthouse**.

Lily finally succeeds in the conventional role of female caregiver by providing Mr. Ramsay with an opportunity to expound on a topic he enjoys. Mr. Ramsay's pain becomes meaningful to Lily—and therefore actually elicits her sympathy—when, by bending down, Mr. Ramsay appears to shape his body into an aesthetic posture of sorrow.

Lily is moved by considering Mr. Ramsay's face and the way it shows his devotion to his work, his suffering, his desperation for sympathy, his quick-changing moods, his inability ever to hide his feelings. She thinks he has "an extraordinary face."

Again, Lily is moved by an aesthetic, art-like image of Mr. Ramsay. The image of his face seems to Lily to be rich with interior meaning.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 3

Relieved to be alone, Lily confronts her canvas thinking how different the "planning airily away from the canvas" is from "actually…making the first mark." She is unsure where to begin but once she begins, attains a rhythmic motion. She thinks how, painting, she is "drawn out…of living, out of community with people." She asks herself why she does it, especially since her painting will surely be hung in a servant's room or forgotten or packed away. She hears "some voice saying…can't paint, can't write," as if repeating speech spoken by a speaker she can no longer remember. She paints "losing consciousness of outer things," discarding her name and outward appearance and surroundings.

Lily believes that the meaning of life is found in work, in art, but she is not entirely sure what the nature of that meaning is. As an artwork can transcend its historical moment to participate in eternity, so too is Lily, while making art, lifted out of her particular personality and circumstance. Still, Lily is under no illusion that the art she produces while in such a state is masterful enough to be immortalized. Mr. Tansley's disembodied words from a decade ago remain floating in Lily's mind.

Suddenly, Lily remembers it was Mr. Tansley who'd originally said the words she murmured and she starts to reminisce about her stay at the summerhouse ten years before. She recalls skipping stones on **the sea** with Mr. Tansley while Mrs. Ramsay sat on a beach rock writing letters and, by the power of her soul, making "out of that miserable silliness and spite…something…which survived, after all these years, complete…almost like a work of art."

The memory of Mr. Tansley's words functions as a gateway memory into the past of ten years ago. Looking back, Lily recognizes Mrs. Ramsay as an artist whose medium was time and the daily odds and ends of lived experience itself.

Taking a break from painting, Lily thinks as she has often thought, "What is the meaning of life?" She reflects that there has been no "great revelation," only "little daily miracles." She compares Mrs. Ramsay's "making of the moment something permanent" to her own project as a painter. Both bring stability to life's flow, and find a shape within shapeless chaos.

Lily's reflection reinforces Mrs. Ramsay's status as an artist. Because there is no grand, single "meaning" to life but only small, quotidian meanings, Lily aims to do with her paintings just what Mrs. Ramsay did with life: make something stable out of the passing moment.

Lily looks at the house, "faint and unreal…pure and exciting." She looks at her canvas. She walks to the lawn's edge to see if she can see Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James setting sail and imagines that one of the distant boats whose sail is just being hoisted is theirs.

Lily's reflections have made her see the ordinary house as something mysterious. Lily looks from the imagined potential painting on her canvas to the imagined sight of the Ramsays at sea.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 4

Sailing off, James and Cam are silently united in stony resistance to their father's tyranny. They had hoped the voyage would fail but the boat sails off and Mr. Ramsay is happy to be moving quickly and listens with relish to Macalister (who mans the boat) describe the great storm at Christmas. James steers and mans the sail, anticipating Mr. Ramsay's criticism at even the slightest mistake he might make. Watching her father, Cam feels proud of him despite her and James' pact of silent resistance. She admires his courage and adventurousness and thinks that, had he been present at the great storm, "he would have launched the lifeboat."

Although James and Cam are inwardly furious and resentful of Mr. Ramsay, their father, who has never been a very good reader of people's interior states, is blithely happy and seems unaffected by their mood. And even as she resents her father, Cam admires the same traditionally masculine qualities in Mr. Ramsay that Mrs. Ramsay admired in him in Chapter 1.

Mr. Ramsay points out the summerhouse on the shore, which looks "peaceful" and "unreal" to Cam. Mr. Ramsay sees a desolate, aged image of himself pacing the terrace of the distant summerhouse. He imagines being "bereft" and being given women's sympathy. He recites a melancholy couplet. Meanwhile, Cam inwardly feels the only reality is the boat they're on. The reality of their life on that faraway shore is "rubbed out," "past." Mr. Ramsay teases Cam for looking at the wrong shore and thinks how hopelessly vague women's minds are, though that vagueness is also their charm.

For Cam, distance extinguishes the meaning of the summerhouse and leaves it looking unreal. For Mr. Ramsay, distance romanticizes the meaning of the summerhouse and allows him to imagine himself as a more pitiable figure: a grieving, older man. Mr. Ramsay expresses his longing for a woman's attention by reciting literature. Mr. Ramsay is still convinced of and charmed by women's "foolishness," as he was with Minta in Chapter 1.

Wanting to make Cam smile, Mr. Ramsay asks about the puppy. Cam feels trapped, wanting to respond and please her father but fearful of breaking her compact with James. James inwardly fears she'll cave into Mr. Ramsay and recalls a blurry memory of his mother turning away from him to attend to a man. Cam compromises by responding to her father, but only partially and sullenly.

Cam's barely articulated response to Mr. Ramsay conveys nothing of the genuine interior anguish that lies behind her words. As Mrs. Ramsay feared in Chapter 1, James has retained his childhood disappointment and resentment of his father across time.

Mr. Ramsay gives up on winning over Cam and takes out his book. Cam thinks how she loves and admires Mr. Ramsay above all other people for "his voice," "his haste," "his oddity," "his passion," his outspokenness. Still his imperious "dominance" remains intolerable and her painful childhood memories of it still make her wake up in the night "trembling with rage."

Cam's conflicted feelings towards her father demonstrate the complexity of interior life. At every moment, internal thought encompasses remembered emotions as well as the fleeting, changing feelings of present experience.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 5

Imagining Mr. Ramsay on the boat, Lily thinks back to how she'd always found things with him "difficult," unlike Minta, who had won him over by flirting. Lily wants to ask Mr. Carmichael (napping or day-dreaming a ways off from her on the lawn) if he remembers. As she stands painting, she also stands within her memory of Mrs. Ramsay on the beach. Lily's mind vacillates between the canvas (whose surface is "feathery and evanescent" even as its underside is "clamped…with bolts of iron") and her memory of sitting in silence beside Mrs. Ramsay looking at **the sea**. As Lily, "dipped into the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there."

Lily has never been able to act out the stereotypical behaviors of womanhood as Minta could. In vacillating between her memories and her present view of her canvas, Lily's reflections blur the distinctions between time and art. Thus, Lily dips her brush "into the past." Thus the description of her canvas—which appears evanescent on the surface but in fact is held tight by iron bolts—could be a description of time as well: seemingly insubstantial and evanescent but at the same time unwavering and all-powerful.

Lily thinks back on Paul and Minta and imagines a series of scenes from their failed marriage. She reflects how making up scenes about people is "what we call 'knowing'" them. She had built the scenes entirely out of a tiny detail about playing chess in coffee houses that Paul had once let slip. Lily remembers how strained relations had seemed between them when she visited once and then, last year, how she'd seen in the way that Minta handed Paul tools to fix the car that things had resolved. Paul, Minta had told Lily, had taken a mistress and she and Paul were now great friends.

Paul and Minta's marriage does not fit the conventional ideal of a man and woman's marriage, and yet it still ends up working out. Lily's imagined scenes of Paul and Minta's marriage are like mental paintings composed, as a painting is, from a snippet of the "real" world that is then transformed at the artist's hand. This sort of interior painting of others' lives is, Lily suggests, the closest one can get to other people's private experiences.

Lily imagines triumphantly recounting the reality of Paul and Minta's failed marriage and her own unmarried life to Mrs. Ramsay, who had been such an eager matchmaker. She wants to tell Mrs. Ramsay that they're all happy even as everything has turned out unlike Mrs. Ramsay wished it. But then she thinks how in fact one pities, dismisses, even holds contempt for the dead and how Mrs. Ramsay "recedes further and further," a distant figure absurdly advocating marriage.

Lily, who once felt so threatened by Mrs. Ramsay's ideas about gender and life's meaning, is now confident enough to contest those ideas to Mrs. Ramsay's face. But, because Mrs. Ramsay's death has exiled her from the present moment, Lily can't summon combativeness against her. Lily just feels sorry for Mrs. Ramsay, whose life recedes as time hurtles forwards.

Lily remembers how Mrs. Ramsay had planned to set her up with Mr. Bankes. Inside parentheses, Lily remembers feeling the heat of love emanating from Paul at the long-ago dinner table, and how that glimpse of love's "roar and…crackle" still defines the phrase 'in love' in Lily's mind. Close parentheses. Lily thinks back to the liberating realization that she need not marry. Feeling, now, that she can finally stand up to Mrs. Ramsay, she realizes "the astonishing power" Mrs. Ramsay had had over her. Lily recalls the pleasure of her long friendship with Mr. Bankes.

Like Paul and Minta's marriage, Lily's adulthood did not end up matching up to Mrs. Ramsay's idea of a meaningful life but it has been meaningful all the same. Lily's vivid memories of Paul's love and of Mrs. Ramsay's intensity demonstrate the power of memory to withstand the passage of time and affect the future.

Thinking back to Mr. Bankes' great admiration for Mrs. Ramsay's beauty, Lily considers beauty's "penalty" which is that "it came too readily…too completely." Beauty "stilled life—froze it." Smoothed over by beauty, it was easy to forget the quivering distinctions constantly changing a living thing. She tries to remember Mrs. Ramsay's particular look as she "clapped her deer-stalker's hat on…ran across the grass."

At other points in the novel, beauty has been identified as a timeless quality (indeed, Mr. Bankes thinks of Mrs. Ramsay's face as classical) but Lily recognizes that that timelessness can also be dangerous. It can obliterate the changing, fleeting particularities that make up lived experience.

Seeing Mr. Carmichael, Lily is suddenly moved to go and wake him except she wants to say so much that she would have no clear thing to say. She feels that Mrs. Ramsay has gone from being a harmless ghost to being something that "wrung the heart." Lily feels "the whole world…dissolved…into a pool of thought." She imagines that, if she asked Mr. Carmichael to "explain it all," he would tell her that everyone and everything is ephemeral. She thinks, though, that words and paint last for, even if her painting itself is forgotten, she could venture to say that "what it attempted" lasted forever.

As she dwells in memory, Lily's memories start to seem more and more powerful, invigorating the remembered image of Mrs. Ramsay and dissolving the present world. Yet dwelling in the past also heightens Lily's awareness of the relentless passage of time. Lily sees that the immortal aspect of art is not the finished artwork itself but the ambition of the artwork, the vision that inspires it.

Turning to look at her painting, Lily realizes she cannot see clearly through the tears that have risen to her eyes. She wonders what precisely she is weeping for. She silently asks of Mr. Carmichael, "Could it be, even for elderly people, that this was life?—startling, unexpected, unknown?" She feels somehow that if she and he were both right now to demand explanation for life's brevity and cruelty, "beauty would roll itself up; the space would fill; those empty flourishes would form into shape" and Mrs. Ramsay would return. She calls Mrs. Ramsay's name aloud, crying.

Lily's interior reflections have expressed themselves externally in her tears without her being aware of it. Lily's question suggests that there is no one meaning of life, so that no matter how experienced or wise one grows, life remains a mystery. At the same time, she longs for that mystery to be unraveled. She imagines that, if beauty's falseness could be overcome, there might somehow be a chance of solving that mystery and restoring the past to the present.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 6

Inside a parenthesis, Macalister's boy cuts a chunk of flesh from the body of a still-living fish to use as bait for a fishing hook and throws the gouged body into **the ocean**.

Juxtaposed with Lily's philosophical meditations, Macalister's boy's action and cutting a chunk off the still-living reminds the reader that life is also just a matter of flesh, blood, and consumption, and that it can be brutal.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 7

Still crying Mrs. Ramsay's name in anguish, Lily thinks how silly she must look and is glad Mr. Carmichael hasn't noticed her outburst. The painful intensity of her grief for Mrs. Ramsay begins to recede and Lily feels that in fact Mrs. Ramsay is beside her wearing a wreath of white flowers. Painting, Lily thinks how, for long after hearing of Mrs. Ramsay's death, she had had this recurring vision of her. Lily notices a boat in the middle of the bay and thinks it must be Mr. Ramsay's boat and wonders where he and the children are.

The pain of the lost past is replaced, for Lily, by the comfort of memory's enduring presence in the present. Even though she is dead, Mrs. Ramsay is "with" Lily. In a way, it is not so different from the image one holds in mind of a living person who is in a distant location, as Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James can still be part of Lily's interior life even though they are out at sea.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 8

On the sailboat, Cam looks at the shore and thinks "They don't feel a thing there." The sail suddenly loses the wind, sags, and the boat stills. Mr. Ramsay doesn't stop reading but James dreads the moment his father will look up and criticize James' handling of the sail. James considers his life-long desire to stab his father in the heart. He has realized as he's aged that in fact it's not his father but his father's moods that he wants to kill. He compares those moods to a carriage wheel that mauls someone's foot by running over it: the damage is done, but not done intentionally or maliciously. James feels that, whatever his profession, he will devote his life to fighting tyranny.

For Cam, distance continues to extinguish the meanings of life on land and makes her feel that people on the shore must be simpler, free of pain. James has borne his childhood resentment of his father throughout his life. But now, since he is no longer a child, James is able to abstract his father's moods from the person of his father and identify Mr. Ramsay as a victim of his own personality.

James thinks back to his memories of childhood, and recollects his childhood vision of **the Lighthouse** as something "silvery, misty-looking…with a yellow eye." But now it is "stark and straight" and detailed with stripes and windows. Still, he thinks his past vision of the Lighthouse is true, too. "For nothing was simply one thing."

Since the Lighthouse functions in the novel as a symbol of human desire, James' two perspectives of it also suggest the different perspectives and kinds of desires one possesses throughout one's life, or as the difference between the dream of attainment of a desire and actual attainment. James himself recognizes that nothing possesses a single meaning: everything is multiple.

James remembers Mr. Ramsay dashing his hopes about going to **the Lighthouse** as a child and Mrs. Ramsay's attention being deflected away from James towards his father. He thinks back to his mother, whom he remembers as the only person who said "whatever came into her head" and "spoke the truth." James exhausts his thoughts and sits miserable and motionless, resenting his father. Then all of a sudden wind bursts into the sail and the boat shoots forward. Mr. Ramsay remains completely absorbed in his book. He slaps his knee.

James memory romanticizes his mother as compared to his father. Chapter 1 ends with Mrs. Ramsay unable to explicitly articulate the true love she feels for Mr. Ramsay, but, in James memory, Mrs. Ramsay always speaks the truth. In his mind, she seems to embody such conventional female virtues as kindness and earnestness.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 9

Inside a parenthesis, Lily thinks of **the sea** as silk stretched across the bay. She thinks of distance's power, how it has devoured Mr. Ramsay, Cam, and James so that she feels they have "become part of the nature of things" and are permanently lost. The smoke from an out of view steamship lingers in the air.

Lily's metaphor turns the sea into a kind of canvas (fabric stretched over a surface). In a perspective similar to Cam's, Lily feels distance extinguishing the meaning of the Ramsays for her until they are "lost."

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 10

On the sailboat, Cam feels that Mr. Ramsay's frustration at her bad sense of direction, James's insistence on their pact of silence, and her own suffering have all "streamed away." Cam is suddenly filled with joy. She thinks even the little island she sees from the boat has "a place in the universe," and thinks Mr. Carmichael or Mr. Bankes could surely tell her for sure from where they sit in the studious, orderly world of the study. She thinks that any idea that can thrive in the study is right. She thinks of how she admires her father's neat handwriting and wisdom and lovability in the study. She wants to point to her father reading now and show James his goodness, though she knows James would maintain still that Mr. Ramsay is just a brutish tyrant.

Cam's sudden ecstasy demonstrates the unpredictably changeable nature of interior life. No discrete event has occurred to trigger her joy; it simply arrives. Through the perspective of her happiness, Cam sees the world full of meaning, with each thing occupying a rightful "place." Cam associates such comfort and knowingness with men and the male environment of her father's study.

Cam feels as safe in the boat as she feels in the study with the men around her. She tells herself a story about shipwreck. She thinks, "about here…a ship had sunk…how we perished, each alone."

The story Cam writes in her head is indirectly inspired by the piece of literature recited by Mr. Ramsay. She uses the same words "how we perished, each alone."

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 11

On the lawn looking at **the sea**, Lily thinks about how one's impression of and feelings about people depend so much on distance. In the quiet, she feels "the unreality" of the early morning and thinks that "it was a way things had sometimes…they became unreal," as when one returned from a trip or emerged from sickness, and, seeming unreal, also seemed most startling, most alive. And one was most free, then, liberated from social convention, habit, small talk.

Lily's reflections recognize that "distance" can mean either extended physical space or extended time. Either form of distance, though, can alter one's perceptions of other people and refresh the familiar objects of the world until they seem vividly strange, freed from worn-out habits and conventions.

Dissatisfied with her painting, Lily feels that she keeps losing track of it when she thinks of Mr. Ramsay. She thinks of beauty when what she wants to express is fresher, "the thing itself before it has been made anything." She feels how inadequate is "the human apparatus for painting or for feeling."

As a painter, Lily does not aspire to capture an immortal stilled image of beauty. Instead, she wants to express fleeting, changeable life in real time.

Sitting down on the lawn, Lily feels that "everything this morning was happening for the first time, perhaps for the last time," and compares her experience of it to a train rider seeing scenery pass along a route he will never ride again.

Lily's reflections have made her acutely aware of the irretrievability of time's passage: how each moment happens only once and can never be returned to.

Seeing Mr. Carmichael, Lily wonders about his sorrow, his experience, his poetry, which she has never read. They only share the experience of staying in a house and making small talk. Still, she thinks that it is "one way of knowing people…the outline, not the detail." She recalls how he had never liked Mrs. Ramsay.

Mr. Carmichael inspires Lily to reflect, again, on what it means to "know" a person. Even without any access to that person's interior life, one can still see the exterior shape of that life, an outline full of meaning.

Lily thinks back on Mrs. Ramsay, on her idiosyncrasies and unique character. She thinks how Mrs. Ramsay differed both from herself and Mr. Carmichael in having an "instinct to go" and always running off on an errand, a good deed, an activity. Whereas Lily and Mr. Carmichael both privilege thought over action, and Mrs. Ramsay's activeness could thus seem "a reproach."

As artists whose mediums are paint and language, Lily and Mr. Carmichael glean the most meaning from life through interior reflection. Yet Mrs. Ramsay, who made art out of lived experience itself, gleaned meaning through action in the exterior world.


Lily thinks of Mr. Tansley, who had become a professor and whom she'd once heard give a lecture during the war on "brotherly love" that struck her as ironic considering his own unlovable character. Still, she knows her own impression of Tansley is "grotesque" since so many of one's ideas about other people are self-serving, "whipping-boys."

Though Mr. Tansley's lecture on love indeed seems out of character with his meanness in Chapter 1, Lily wisely acknowledges that any onlooker's impression of Mr. Tansley is incomplete and may say more about the onlooker than about the man himself.

Lily stirs her brush among the ants on the lawn and distresses them by making them a small mountain to climb.

As Lily earlier dipped her brush into "the past," here she dips it into the present and the material world.


Lily thinks how one would need more than fifty pairs of eyes to see one woman because, in order to see her fully, one would have to see her in her every aspect and from every perspective.

As James reflected that nothing had only one meaning, Lily realizes that no single perspective is complete. Any "truth" must draw on many different perspectives.

Lily considers Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's marriage and feels like she can remember their courtship, which she never witnessed. She does not invent it, but rather feels that amidst the Ramsays "in the rough and tumble of daily life" there was "constantly a sense of repetition" which set up confluences and echoes. Still, Lily reminds herself not to romanticize their marriage, remembering the glimpses she'd gotten of their arguments and hard-won resolutions. But then they'd emerge from the difficulty and would be restored to "be as usual."

Lily's memory suggests that the shape of the past survives into the present and its contours are traced again and again in ongoing repetition. Thus, Lily feels she recalls something she never saw. Though Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay once seemed to Lily to be the symbol of marriage itself, Lily reminds herself not to forget that they were also real people with ordinary marital difficulties.


Sitting still on the lawn, Lily appears to be in a trance even as she is "moving underneath with extreme speed." Somebody in the house sits down at the window where Mrs. Ramsay had once sat and Lily thinks, painting again, that the goal is to feel that the objects of the world are completely ordinary and completely miraculous at the same time.

Even when Lily's body is still she is being propelled forward by time. Lily is given another chance to compose the painting she started ten years ago, now with the knowledge that painting should embrace life's meanings and mysteries simultaneously.

The windowpane goes white as if a breeze had blown a curtain over it and Lily feels thrown into despair. But the despair, then, "became part of ordinary experience" and Lily feels that Mrs. Ramsay sits knitting in the chair. Lily goes to the edge of the lawn still holding her brush to look out at **the sea** for Mr. Ramsay.

Time, whose relentless passage has caused Lily so much anguish, now comforts her by giving her a remembered image of Mrs. Ramsay. As Lily has dipped her brush in the past and the present, she now brings it to the sea, the symbol of nature's chaos and uncaring apathy towards human life.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 12

On the sailboat, James watches Mr. Ramsay looking very old reading and thinks he is the image of "that loneliness" which they both believe resides at the heart of everything. Approaching **the Lighthouse**, James is pleased to feel that it somehow rebukes the optimistic pleasantries of old ladies among the garden at home. He feels he shares this knowledge, too, with his father, and recites a line of poetry ("We are driving before a gale—we must sink") just like his father would.

Time has aged Mr. Ramsay and refined James' feelings towards his father. He can now see that, despite his resentment of Mr. Ramsay's moods, he and his father share an understanding of the meaning of life. He also shares his father's inclination to turn to poetry to express life's gloom.

Cam thinks how, while she and James have resolved to fight their father with a pact of silence, Mr. Ramsay is totally oblivious of the fact and thereby flies, as he often does, out of reach of anyone trying to snare him. Mr. Ramsay initiates lunch and, as they eat, Cam feels steadied by his presence. She feels they are simultaneously having an ordinary lunch and making an adventurous escape from shipwreck, as in the story she's telling herself.

Mr. Ramsay's inability to perceive other people's interior states frees him from the burden of people's silently conveyed messages and moods. As Lily seeks to balance the ordinariness of life with life's miraculous mystery, so too does Cam balance these two visions of life over lunch.

Macalister's boy points out that they've reached the spot on the water where the ship had sunk and three men had drowned. James and Cam dread Mr. Ramsay exclaiming the line, "But I beneath a rougher **sea**," but, to their relief, he does not. They are nearing shore and their father praises James' steering. Cam knows that James must be ecstatic, having finally gotten the praise from his father that he most wants. Yet James is so happy, that he does not show any sign of it, afraid of losing any part of his pleasure by sharing it with the world.

James and Cam are pleasantly surprised to realize that their father is not as transparently predictable as they think he is. Cam feels that James' desire for his father's praise organizes his whole life and gives it meaning. James, like Mrs. Ramsay, is expert at concealing his interior emotions behind his external appearance.

As the sailboat pulls up to **the Lighthouse**, James and Cam watch Mr. Ramsay all ready to leap off the boat and wonder what he's thinking, what drives him, what he wants. They each long to offer to give him anything. But he asks nothing of them and they have no insight into his mind. He directs the children to bring the packages for the Lighthouse men and stands in the boat's bow. James thinks he looks as if he is proclaiming that there is no God. Cam thinks he looks as if he is leaping into space. He jumps "like a young man" onto the rock and his children follow him.

Mr. Ramsay continues to be opaque to his children. Though they each feel Mr. Ramsay embodies the meaning of life, his own interior life and personal desires are unknown to them.

THE LIGHTHOUSE, 13

On the lawn, Lily says, "He must have reached it." **The Lighthouse** has disappeared into the haze and she is weary from looking at it and imagining Mr. Ramsay landing at it, "which…seemed to be one and the same effort." Lily feels she has finally given him the sympathy she had wanted to give him that morning. Mr. Carmichael stands beside her and says, "They will have landed," making Lily feel that he has in fact been in synced conversation with her all morning, despite his silence. He appears to her like a kind "old pagan god" presiding over all humankind.

Lily's reflection dissolves the barrier between interior and exterior life as well as the barriers between separate people: she feels that her interior imagination of Mr. Ramsay's reaching the Lighthouse and Mr. Ramsay's own exterior experience of reaching the Lighthouse are one and the same. Lily feels time and experience have become communal, and she believes the distant Mr. Ramsay has received her sympathy as she believes Mr. Carmichael has shared her silent thoughts.

Lily looks at her painting and thinks once again how it will be thrown away and forgotten, but doesn't care. With sudden clarity, she draws a line in the middle of the canvas, then lays down her brush, exhausted. She thinks, "Yes…I have had my vision."

Confident that the meaning of art lies in ambition and vision rather than in material product, Lily finishes her painting. What happens to the painting is less important her—or not important to her—compared to the fact that she feels she has captured her vision and immortalized it into art.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Ross, Margaret. "*To the Lighthouse*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 9 Feb 2014. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Ross, Margaret. "*To the Lighthouse*." LitCharts LLC, February 9, 2014. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-the-lighthouse.

To cite any of the quotes from *To the Lighthouse* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Woolf, Virginia. To the Lighthouse. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 1989.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Woolf, Virginia. To the Lighthouse. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 1989.