

## Dusting Off the Classics:

### Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

University of Denver Enrichment Program

Richard Sacks – Winter/Spring 2021 – section#2



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## Update Page for Class of 5/19/21

Course materials and info page: <https://sacks-richard.com/lighthouse-du-materials-2>

**For our second class (that of 5/19/21)**, we will try to work our way up through section 17 of "The Window" (the first of the novel's three parts), picking where we left off in section 4 at the bottom of page 20 as "Looking at the far sand hills, William Bankes thought of Ramsay." As per the syllabus, please try to read through section 17 which ends on page 111; here are some questions that you might want to play around with if you have the time:

- 1) What do you make of **some of the early scenes (in sections 4 and 6 of "The Window") with an extended focus on Mr. Ramsay**? For example, there is the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of section 4 (beginning on the bottom of pg. 20) which mostly involves Bankes' and Lily's thoughts about Mr. Ramsay, including "an odd illumination in to his heart" (top of pg. 21) and the "kitchen table ... when you're not there" sequence (pp. 23-25). And in section 6 of "The Window" we hear about Mr. Ramsay's obsession with proceeding beyond Q to R (pp. 33-35) and how he imagines himself (pg. 34-36) as the "leader of a doomed expedition" (pg. 36). Note that sections 4 and 6 also contain all 7 instances of the phrase "some one had blundered" which is the key line in [Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade"](#) (the poem is first quoted in *TTL* in W.3 at the top of page 17).
- 2) What do you make of **the focus in section 9 of "The Window" on the painting which Lily has been working on**, the "subject matter" of which is Mrs. Ramsay sitting with James "in the window which opened on the terrace" (W.3, pg. 15)? But we're also presented in section 9 with so many other elements of Lily's painting: for example "colour burning on a framework of steel; the light of a butterfly's wing lying upon the arches of a cathedral" (pg. 48); "the residue of her [= Lily's] thirty three years, the deposit of each day's living mixed with something more secret than she has ever spoken or shown in all those days" (pg. 52); a "triangular purple shape" (pg. 52); and "The question ... of the relations of masses, of lights and shadows" (pg. 53). Also, in case you find it interesting and/or provocative, here is [a link to an online "In Focus" presentation at the Tate in London](#) about some works of Woolf's sister (the painter Vanessa Bell), in particular her 1914 piece "Abstract Painting."
- 3) What do you make of **the book Mrs. Ramsay is reading to James, the "Grimm fairy story" (W.7, pg. 38) about "the Fisherman's Wife" (W.7, pg. 39) which is directly quoted 5 times in section 10 of "The Window"** (the only earlier direct quote is at W.8, p. 42)? [Here's a link to the story](#) in case you want to go down that rabbit hole.
- 4) What do you make of **the scene (section 11 of "The Window") focusing on Mrs. Ramsay sitting alone** immediately after James is fetched by Mildred? – "For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of – to think; well, not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. 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" (pg. 62, the 3rd sentence of W.11), in the same paragraph that ends "We are in the hands of the Lord" (pg. 63).
- 5) What do you make of **the scene on the beach (section 14 of "The Window")**, the entirety of which is placed in parentheses, and which is preceded by what I'm pretty sure is the shortest paragraph of the novel ("Did Nancy go with them?" which ends W.13 on pg. 73) and is followed by the novel's shortest section (W.15, pg. 79)?
- 6) What do you make of **the dinner party (section 17 of "The Window") which begins with Mrs. Ramsay thinking "But what have I done with my life" (p. 82) and ends "as a scene which was vanishing even as she looked, ... it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past" (p. 111)**? W.17 is the longest section of the novel, and Woolf wrote of it (in a [letter to her lover Vita Sackville-West of 5/13/1927](#)): "The dinner party the best thing I ever wrote." Among the scene's many many challenges, you might find it interesting to torture yourself by trying to paint in your mind's eye "the faces on both sides of the table ... brought nearer by the candlelight, and composed ... into a party round a table" (p. 97). Also, [here is a link to the text of Charles Elton's poem "Luriana Lurilee"](#) which surfaces during the last two pages of the section (pp. 110-111); the poem was known to Woolf from her husband and/or Vita, long before it was published.