

## 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 5/26/21

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

**For our third class (that of 5/26/21)**, we will pick up where we left off – starting to work our way through the dinner party scene ("The Window" 17). We'll then proceed to the last two sections of "The Window," wend our way as best we can through "Time Passes," and finally (as passing time allows) begin our examination of the first three sections of "The Lighthouse." So as per the syllabus, please try to read through page 162 (where L.3 ends). Here as usual are some questions that you might want to play around with if you have the time (the first repeats the final question from last time):

- 1) What do you make of **the dinner party (section 17 of "The Window," pp. 82-111) 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 on 5/13/1927](#)): "The dinner party the best thing I ever wrote." 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 from Vita, long before it was published.
- 2) What do you make of **the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph (W.18, pp. 112-113) of the scene immediately following the dinner party, a paragraph in which we are taken inside Mrs. Ramsay's head as she looks back on the evening** (e.g., at one point in the paragraph she thinks: "Yes, that was done then, accomplished; and as with all things done, became solemn. Now one thought of it, cleared of chatter and emotion, it seemed always to have been, only was shown now and so being shown, struck everything into stability. They would, she thought, going on again, however long they lived, come back to this night; this moon; this wind; this house: and to her too")?
- 3) What do you make of **the final section of "The Window" (section 19, pp. 117-124), the scene with Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay together in the library?** In particular, we witness two epiphany-like moments in Mrs. Ramsay's mind: 1) "'Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose,' she read, and so reading she was ascending, she felt, on to the top, on to the summit. How satisfying! How restful! All the odds and ends of the day stuck to this magnet; her mind felt swept, felt clean. And then there it was, suddenly entire; she held it in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, here—the sonnet" (pg. 121, where the sonnet she's reading is [Shakespeare's Sonnet #98](#)); and 2) "And smiling she looked out of the window and said (thinking to herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness)—'Yes, you were right. It's going to be wet tomorrow. You won't be able to go.' And she looked at him smiling. For she had triumphed again. She had not said it: yet he knew" (p. 124, the final lines of "The Window").
- 4) What do you make of **"Time Passes" (pp. 125-143), the middle "corridor" "join[ing]" the "two blocks" of the novel?** In [her diary entry of 4/30/26](#), Woolf wrote: "Yesterday I finished the first part of *To the Lighthouse*, & today began the second. I cannot make it out—here is the most difficult abstract piece of writing—I have to give an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless & featureless with nothing to cling to..." I'm not sure any of us can "make it out," but we might find it provocative (perhaps even useful!) to start with the combination of the first three lines spoken by those "coming up from the beach" in TP.1: a) "It's almost too dark to see"; b) "One can hardly tell which is the sea and which is the land"; and c) "Do we leave that light burning?" (all on pg. 125). By the way, [Woolf's first draft of TP](#) did not begin with the material of section 1, but rather that of section 2.
- 5) What do you make of **section 3 of "The Lighthouse" (pp. 156-162) – the 1<sup>st</sup> of the sections on land after the "little company bound together" (L.2, pg. 155) has departed for its day's sail – when Lily begins painting again** and makes "her first quick decisive stroke.... A second time she did it—a third time.... Down in the hollow of one wave she saw the next wave towering higher and higher above her" (p. 158)?