TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

5 May 1927

60. From an unsigned review, *Times Literary Supplement*

5 May 1927, 315

Each of Mrs Woolf's novels has inspired a lively curiosity as to the next. One wondered what would follow *Mrs Dalloway;* and its successor, with certain points of likeness, is yet a different thing. It is still more different from most other stories. A case like Mrs. Woolf's makes one feel the difficulty of getting a common measure to estimate fiction; for her work, so adventurous and intellectually imaginative, really invites a higher test than is applied to most novels.

In form *To the Lighthouse* is as elastic as a novel can be. It has no plot, though it has a scheme and a motive; it shows characters in outline rather than in the round; and while it depends almost entirely on the passing of time, it expands or contracts the time-sense very freely. The first and longest part of the book is almost stationary, and describes a party of people gathered in the summer at a house on the Scottish coast:

[Plot summary omitted]

Such are the bare bones of the framework; but one feels they are no more like the whole story than the skeleton carved in a mediaeval tomb is to the robed and comely effigy above it. For the book has its own motion: a soft stir and light of perceptions, meeting or crossing, of the gestures and attitudes, the feelings and thoughts of people: of instants in which these are radiant or absurd, have the burden of

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sadness or of the inexplicable. It is a reflective book, with an ironical or wistful questioning of life and reality. Somehow this steals into the pages, whether there is a sunny peace in the garden, or Mr Ramsay is interrupted in a fairy-tale, or a couple is late for dinner, so that one is inclined to say that this question of the meaning of things, however masked, is not only the essence but the real protagonist in the story. One is hardly surprised when it emerges openly now and again towards the end:

[Quotes p. 277 'What was it then?' to 'The tears ran down her face.']

Perhaps this is one reason why you are less conscious of Mrs Woolf's characters than they are of each other. They have an acute consciousness which reminds you of the people in Henry James, but with a difference. The characters of Henry James are so absorbed in each other that they have no problem beyond the truth, or otherwise, of their relations; and they are so intensely seen as persons that they are real. But the people in Mrs Woolf's book seem to be looking through each other at some farther question; and, although they interact vividly, they are not completely real. No doubt, as Lily Briscoe the painter thinks in the novel, to know people in outline is one way of knowing them. And they are seen here in the way they are meant to be seen. But the result is that, while you know quite well the kind of people represented in the story, they lack something as individuals. Mr Ramsay, certainly—masterful and helpless, egotist and hero—does leave a deep mark by the end. His wife, with her calm beauty, her sympathy and swift decided actions, is more of a type, though her personality is subtly pervasive even when she has ceased to live. But there is a significant curtness in the parenthesis which...announces her death: 'Mr Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but Mrs Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out in vain. They remained empty.' Here Mrs Woolf's detachment seems a little strained, and, in fact, this transitional part of the book is not its strongest part.

One comes back, however, to the charm and pleasure of her design. It is carried through with a rare subtlety. Every little thread in it—Mr Ramsay writing a book, Lily Briscoe struggling with her picture, the lights in the bay, the pathos and the absurdity—is woven in one texture, which has piquancy and poetry by turns. A sad book in the main, with all its entertainment, it is one to return to; for it has that power of leaving a vision which is less often found, perhaps, in novels than in a

short story. This springs from a real emotion, best described in words of Mrs Woolf's own: 'There might be lovers whose gift it was to choose out the elements of things and place them together and so, giving them a wholeness not theirs in life, make of some scene, or meeting of people (all now gone and separate), one of those globed compacted things over which thought lingers and love plays.'

61. Louis Kronenberger, from a review, *New York Times*

8 May 1927, 2

Louis Kronenberger (b. 1904). American novelist and critic. This was more favourable than his later reviews of *The Waves* (No. 89) and *Between the Acts* (No. 134).

It was with *Mrs Dalloway* that Virginia Woolf achieved a novel of first-rate importance rather than of great promise and talent, and as a method in fiction *Mrs Dalloway* has begun already to make its influence keenly felt. Two novels of the present season seem to pay it the tribute of imitation: it is written all over Nathalie S.Colby's highly successful *Green Forest* and just a faint flavour of it creeps into Babette Deutsch's much less successful *In Such a Night*. The method of *Mrs Dalloway* is substantially retained by Mrs Woolf in this new novel, *To the Lighthouse*, but though one encounters again her strikingly individual mingling of inward thought with outward action—in which the 'stream of consciousness' style is liberated from its usual chaos and, by means of selection and sense of order, made formally compact—one finds the method applied to somewhat different aims.

Mrs Dalloway, of course, is Clarissa Dalloway from cover to cover, and for that reason it has a magnificently concentrated clarity. It is Clarissa

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in relation to herself, her family, her friends, her servants, her milieu; it is her servants, her family, her friends, in relation to her. *To the Lighthouse*, on the other hand, is a book of interrelationships among people, and though there are major and minor characters the major ones are not, as Clarissa Dalloway was, the alpha and omega of the story, but more truly the means for giving to the story its harmony and unity, its focal points. Those who reject *To the Lighthouse* as inferior to *Mrs Dalloway* because it offers no one with half the memorable lucidity of Clarissa Dalloway must fail to perceive its larger and, artistically, more difficult aims. They must fail to notice the richer qualities of mind and imagination and emotion which Mrs Woolf, perhaps not wanting them, omitted from *Mrs Dalloway*. They must fail to appreciate that as an author develops he will always break down the perfection he has achieved in an earlier stage of his writing in order to reach new objectives...

[A few expository paragraphs omitted here]

It is the final portion of the book which is most perplexing. It seems to sound in the minor what the long first portion sounded in the major, to persist as an ironical mood, to re-establish a scene with the sorry changes time has wrought, to reduce a symbolical achievement when it is finally made to the level of negation. The long opening portion seems to be carrying you ahead toward something which will be magnificently expressive, and then this final portion becomes obscure, a matter of arcs, of fractions, of uncoordinated notes. By comparison with the rest this final portion seems pale and weak. Perhaps there is a reason for this: perhaps Mrs Woolf meant to show that with Mrs Ramsay's death things fall apart, get beyond correlation. Mr Ramsay is no longer interesting—can it be because he is no longer counterpoised against his wife? Life seems drifting, as the Ramsays drift over the bay in their boat, and all their physical vigor and all their reaching of the lighthouse at last conveys no significance.

The truth is that this final portion of the book strikes a minor note, not an intentional minor note which might still in the artistic sense be major, but a meaningless minor note which conveys the feeling that one has not quite arrived somewhere, that the story which opens brilliantly and carries on through a magnificent interlude ends with too little force and expressiveness.

At any rate the rest of the book has its excellencies. Like *Mrs Dalloway* it is underlaid with Mrs Woolf's ironic feeling toward life, though here character is not pitted against manners, but against other character.

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Once again Mrs Woolf makes use of her remarkable method of characterization, a method not based on observation or personal experience, but purely synthetic, purely creational. Clarissa Dalloway is a marvelous synthesis, and it is just for that reason that *Mrs Dalloway* which has been identified because of its modernity with the *Ulysses* school, differs from it in character fundamentals, for it is as objective as *Ulysses* is autobiographical and observational. There is nothing 'photographic' about Mrs Woolf's characters, here or in *Mrs Dalloway*. Neither Clarissa nor Mrs Ramsay has anything autobiographical about her; both are complete creations and both, for all their charm and graces, must suffer a little beneath the searchlight of Mrs Woolf's independently used mind and sense of irony.

In *To the Lighthouse* there is nobody who even approaches Clarissa Dalloway in completeness and memorability, but on a smaller and perhaps more persuasive scale Mrs Ramsay achieves powerful reality. The other characters are not fully alive because they are not whole enough. Most of them are one-dimensional fragments that have been created with great insight but insufficient vitality. They have minds, moods, emotions–but they get all three through creative intellect. For passion Mrs Woolf has no gift–her people never invade the field of elementary emotions: they are hardly animal at all.

It is, I think, in the superb interlude called 'Time Passes' that Mrs Woolf reaches the most impressive height of the book, and there one can find a new note in her work, something beyond the ironic sophistication and civilized human values of *Mrs Dalloway*. In this description of the unused house in the Hebrides, entered for ten years only by old and forlorn women caretakers and the wind and the sea air and the light of the lighthouse lamp, she has told the story of all life passing on, of change and destruction and solitude and waste–the story which more than a little embodies the plot action of the rest of the book, but above all the story which has for man the profoundest human values of all, though for ten years the house itself never received a human guest. The great beauty of these eighteen pages of prose carries in it an emotional and ironical undertone that is superior to anything else that the first-class technician, the expert stylist, the deft student of human life in Mrs Woolf ever has done. Here is prose of extraordinary distinction in our time: here is poetry:

[Quotes p. 198 'But what after all is one night' to 'plates of brightness.']

To the Lighthouse has not the formal perfection, the cohesiveness, the

intense vividness of characterization that belong to *Mrs Dalloway*. It has particles of failure in it. It is inferior to *Mrs Dalloway* in the degree to which its aims are achieved; it is superior in the magnitude of the aims themselves. For in its portrayal of life that is less orderly, more complex and so much doomed to frustration, it strikes a more important note, and it gives us an interlude of vision that must stand at the head of all Virginia Woolf's work.

62. Rachel A.Taylor, review, *Spectator*

14 May 1927, 871

Rachel A.Taylor (1876–1960). Scottish poetess.

'The dark light, the bright shadow' was what Leonardo sought, he said, through all the sciences and all the arts. The bright shadow, the dark light, seem to shift and flicker and fuse in strange pavane to make the fascinating chiaroscuro of the novels of Mrs Woolf. The woven paces of dark and bright on the lovely superficies of any book of hers offer an aesthetic pleasure so deep that at moments you almost forget the dreaming figures beneath, whose vibrating hearts actually create that enigmatic pattern.

Enigmatic, darkly bright, flowing into the secret recesses of the consciousness, floating out its rose-pale shells, its wavering shapes, its blood-red coral, moulding people that combine a modern irony with a mystic reverie, the genius of Virginia Woolf is at once more difficult and more original than that of any other woman novelist to-day. *Mrs Dalloway* is a thing perfect in its kind, a gleaming super-subtle piece of fine filaments of impression and emotion gathered into the pattern of the Rose, a complete crystal eddy of the River of Life. *To the Lighthouse* is not so flawless in its aesthetic effect. The Unities agree with this novelist's power;

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and here the Unity of Time is rather violently broken, while the parts of the book seem disproportionate. But it is even more wistfully human, perhaps. Nothing happens, and everything happens. To the lighthouse the child James desires to go; and, sitting by his mother's feet, is tauntingly denied by his despotic, myriad-mooded father. To the lighthouse, long years after, he does go, dragged there reluctant by that despotic myriad-minded father, and is suddenly, mysteriously reconciled with him in his heart. Between these incidents people are born and marry and die, but all these matters are incidental to the souls that cross and intercross in the web of an everlasting reverie.

In this book there are secret flames in flowers and inanimate things, waking in response to the fixed gaze of the unconscious symbolists who are weaving them into the tapestry of their dreams. Subtle sensations are caught here that are elusive as a fragrance or a flavour. Psychical processes are laid bare by burning piercing images. Cadences are heard that never violate the rhythm of prose, yet chime aerial and strange as the rhythm of verse. In the ghostly second part, where the perishing life of the house sighs away, the lamenting style, with its lilted-in refrains, and its bitter tragic parentheses, in some passages chants heavily and dreamily like the prose litanies of Mallarmé. 'Frisson d'Hiver', for example.

Indeed more beauty and penetrative characterization than can here be described resides within this book. The Ramsays, husband and wife, move at the centre of attention, along the red torch-plants in the twilight garden. The husband is a remarkably observed figure; but I prefer to linger a moment on his wife, who has the deathless grace, regality, and sweetness of legendary women. She is whimsical, extravagant in speech, absurd a little, versed in all tender ways of loving. She bewitches you. Even the crude Tansley thinks of cyclamen and violets when he sees her as if 'stepping though fields of flowers, taking to her breast buds that had broken and lambs that had fallen'. Yet she is lost in an endless sad reverie: she feels remote and lonely like the white beam of the lighthouse laid on the darkness. She is sorrowful for something lost out of Time—something that, found, would illuminate eternity. So her spirit goes veiled and dreamy like the carved Greek women mourning on the side of a Sidonian sarcophagus.

Under the modern talk all the folk around her go sunken also in their peculiar meditation. But why, when this account of the interaction of 'naked thinking hearts' needs merely a setting of a house and a terrace, some rocks, a bay and a lighthouse, must the house be placed in the Hebrides? Mrs Woolf creates her own atmosphere wherever she

takes her people; but to anybody who has been subdued by the magic of the Hebridean atmosphere, there is a disturbance of impression, a collision of spiritual values. Her pattern should never be superimposed.

63. Arnold Bennett, review, *Evening Standard*

23 June 1927, 5

Like many hostile reviewers (and subsequent unfavourable critics) Bennett spared *To the Lighthouse* from his usual condemnation.

I have read a bunch of novels. I must say, despite my notorious grave reservations concerning Virginia Woolf, that the most original of the bunch is *To the Lighthouse*. It is the best book of hers that I know. Her character drawing has improved. Mrs Ramsay almost amounts to a complete person. Unfortunately she goes and dies, and her decease cuts the book in two. Also there are some pleasing records of interesting sensations outside the range of the ordinary novelist. The scheme of the story is rather wilful—designed seemingly, but perhaps not really, to exhibit virtuosity. A group of people plan to sail in a small boat to a lighthouse. At the end some of them reach the lighthouse in a small boat. That is the externality of the plot.

The middle part, entitled 'Time Passes', shows a novel device to give the reader the impression of the passing of time—a sort of cataloguing of intermediate events. In my opinion it does not succeed. It is a short cut, but a short cut that does not get you anywhere. To convey the idea of the passage of a considerable length of time is an extremely difficult business, and I doubt if it can be accomplished by means of a device, except the device of simply saying 'Time passes', and leaving the effort of imagination to the reader. Apart from this honest shirking of the difficulty, there is no alternative but to convey

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the impression very gradually, without any direct insistence—in the manner of life itself.

I have heard a good deal about the wonders of Mrs Woolf's style. She sometimes discovers a truly brilliant simile. She often chooses her adjectives and adverbs with beautiful felicity. But there is more in style than this. The form of her sentences is rather tryingly monotonous, and the distance between her nominatives and her verbs is steadily increasing. Still, *To the Lighthouse* has stuff in it strong enough to withstand quite a lot of adverse criticism.

64. Orlo Williams, review, *Monthly Criterion*

July 1927, 74–8

Mrs Woolf is not an inventive writer: but then—what time or need has she for inventing, when she cannot overtake all that she sees and feels and observes that other people see and feel? Miss Lily Briscoe, in this last novel, as she is painting in the garden at Skye where, ten years before, Mrs Ramsay, her dead friend, made part of the picture, sitting in the window with her youngest boy upon her knee, becomes the vehicle of a reverie upon which all Mrs Woolf's novels are simply variations.

[Quotes pp. 249–50 'She must rest for a moment' to 'Mrs Ramsay said.']

And, in the last lines of the book, 'Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.'

These passages—one could find many others akin to them—supply a perfect text for a survey, more exhaustive than space here allows me, of all Mrs Woolf's novels. They reveal, in a way that makes commentary superfluous, the nature of her inspiration, and they explain the recurrence of certain preoccupations, even of certain typical characters and details, in her work. If you read the five novels consecutively, this recurrence is

very striking. *The Voyage Out* is nothing but a tentative piecing together of the riddles of life, in which, through inexperience, Mrs Woolf used far too many pieces. The large company at Santa Marina, given overmuch to argumentative dialogue, a little overpower the mind with their partial contributions to the stating and solving of the riddles: yet the essential focuses of the great mysteries—as they appear to Mrs Woolf—are there. Mr and Mrs Ambrose, the elderly, egotistical scholar and his wife, besides Mr and Mrs Dalloway, focus that supreme riddle of human relations which is marriage; Rachel focuses the mystery of a child growing up; Hewet and she, Susan and Arthur, the mystery of falling in love; and Rachel again, dying in a glow of this mystery, focuses that other mystery, the deepest, of death. *Night and Day*, this author's second and last essay in the traditional novel-style—of all her novels the most *serré*, the most careful, and, in the sense of achieving its purpose, the most striking—is concerned with nothing else but the riddle of young people of different temperaments in love and at cross purposes. The contrast drawn between those who find marriage easy, and those who find it difficult, to envisage is most subtly drawn, and with notable humour. If the situation between Katherine Hilbery and Ralph Denham is drawn out in too tenuous an intricacy, these characters are nobly seen. Katherine and Ralph are finer natures whose high visions, even of one another, can only be momentary, and yet seem to degrade the grosser realities of every day. Does Katherine love the everyday Ralph, or Ralph the everyday Katherine? They torture themselves in this debate till dear, inconsequent Mrs Hilbery solves the question by saying 'We have to have faith in our vision'—the motto, in a larger sense, of all Mrs Woolf's art.

Jacob's Room, her first long excursion in the fragmentary style, is nothing more than a picture of a young man's life: Cambridge, London, Paris, Greece, flashes from numberless, facets, gay, serious, fleshly, trivial, now the inconsequent mind, now the body, now one vision, now another; and it puts the riddle in another way. If such a life is ended by a fragment of shell—what does it mean? Where is, where was, its reality? *Mrs Dalloway*, again, is an attempt to see how much of the riddle can be got into twenty-four hours.—'Life, heaven only knows why one loves it so?', love (Peter Walsh), marriage (the Dalloways), death and madness or visions pushed to excess (Septimus Smith), the change wrought by years, the intricacies and inconsistencies of character, not to be summed up by arithmetic, the old lady next door seen daily but unknown, 'the supreme mystery...was simply this: here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that, or love?' And

now in this last novel, who should appear again but Mr and Mrs Ambrose (of *The Voyage Out*), under the name of Ramsay, with their problem more poetically stated and their characters drawn with a far greater beauty? Who but the dry Mr Pepper of that same novel—vast knowledge, a dry heart, no aptitude for family life, and views on the cooking of vegetables—under the name of Bankes? The unsuccessful don called Jenkinson, casually mentioned by Mr Ambrose, here takes flesh as Augustus Carmichael, a poet, with a moustache stained yellow by opium and an unwisely married wife in the background. And the riddle of life is re-compounded in the Ramsays' summer house on the island of Skye, of these things—that Mr Ramsay was an egotistic, tyrannical man, conscious of partial failure though distinguished, and needing oh so much sympathy, praise and reassurance from Mrs Ramsay; that, at the same time, he had certain elements of fineness not possessed by Bankes, who had greatness but no inner fire; that Mrs Ramsay wore herself out giving, and giving, to her husband, yet she knew his faults, and she worshipped him as her moral superior, but still she had to hide from him domestic worries, and she could not tell him that she loved him (as Richard Dalloway could not tell Mrs Dalloway), but he undefstood it; yet that his children, especially James, did not love him, because he crushed the life out of their mother by his demands upon her emotions; and Mrs Ramsay, though extremely beautiful and impressive, was a little imperious and masterful to other people, who often resented it; that Mrs Ramsay suddenly died; and that Lily Briscoe, painting on the same spot ten years later, while Mr Ramsay had carried off two secretly rebellious children to the Lighthouse—James, ten years before having desired to kill his father for disappointing his hopes of this very expedition—tries to make out what really Mrs Ramsay stood for, in relation to Mr Ramsay, to other people, to the world in general and to eternity. The upshot, the only possible upshot, is that she stands as a lovely vision, as unsubstantial, as vivid, as fleeting, as eternal, as past, as immortal, as are all the visions of those who truly see. One can only say, Life stand still; and life stands still, long enough for the seeing, wondering mind, not long enough for the brush or the pen. To have had the vision—to have lived—is the thing: if one has little to show for it, never mind.

Having enjoyed, through the five novels, all the rich variety of impressions which illustrate the main themes, the humour that is never studied or artificial, the brilliant subsidiary sketches of human character (such as Mrs Hilbery in *Night and Day*, Miss Kilman and Peter Walsh

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in *Mrs Dalloway*), the swift and suggestive mixture of detail and reflection, the sharp physical imagery of the passages where to the observing mind there comes what the Germans would call a *Steigerung*, the sudden loomings up of ordinary people or things, like Mr and Mrs Ramsay playing ball with their children, as symbols of tremendous import and stature, the sensitiveness of feminine observation abnormally acute, the skilfully used anger and pathos, one sees all the better how the passage quoted at the beginning of this article sums up the whole. It is not astonishing, therefore, that the society observed in Mrs Woolf's novels is more or less the same throughout—that of the cultivated intellectual, or governing, class, with its wide connections up and down, its chance contacts, its conversational trend towards Plato, Shakespeare, poetry or politics, its standards of success and failure and its typical joys and disasters—because the visions, in the last resort, are all the author's and relate, one is certain, to the visions that in the course of years have impressed themselves on her mortal eyes and brain. It is not that she puts herself into all the characters—though she puts herself into many, and deals freely with her own intimacies in certain others—but that, even when she is ostensibly portraying another mind, say that of Mr Ramsay ruminating on his failure, of Peter Walsh stalking a pretty girl, of greedy spiteful Miss Kilman, or of Septimus Warren Smith engulfed in his hallucinations, it is her mind observing the other mind of which we are conscious.

Mrs Woolf's art, in other words, is intensely personal in its stamp, especially now that she has abandoned the solidly constructive method of narration for her uniquely reflective impressionism. This is simply a statement, not a critical judgment, but it leads to the question whether she will ever succeed in embodying her personal vision so as, even faintly, to correspond to her intentions, which are those of a serious artist whose work, vivid, exciting, sympathetic, rightly excites a profound admiration.

'Making of the moment something permanent'—this is the work of the poet, the painter, the musician, not of the dramatist nor, as I believe with Mr Wyndham Lewis, essentially of the novelist. For imaginative prose of this kind there ought to be another name, since it is a thing different from the novel, verging at its most exalted moments on poetry. The average novel-reader, mainly interested in 'story' and characterization, will probably judge the first section of *To the Lighthouse*, where Mrs Ramsay is alive, the most successful. After her death the book becomes more lyrical in intonation; the second section, in

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particular, is a rhapsody where ten years pass away in a kind of incantation, broken by rather abrupt snapping of threads in parenthesis. Yet the whole, with its greater emotional concentration, its sharper focusing, the fuller stature of its characters, and the completer resolution of its material into a meditation in images, or symbols—compare the section describing the dinner here with Mrs Dalloway's party—shows the mark at which, with ever increasing power and sureness, Mrs Woolf is aiming. Her mastery increases with each book, but, I fear, it will always fall short of her vision. Poetry alone could give us that: in prose we shall have to be content with the 'matches struck unexpectedly in the dark'. On this score she may possibly suffer with posterity, who may desire another brand of match: but in her own day she lights a purer and more searching flame than most, by which we recognise that, whatever science applied to existence may achieve, only imagination illumines life.

65. Conrad Aiken, 'The Novel as Work of Art', *Dial* (Chicago)

July 1927, vol. 83, 41–4

Conrad Aiken (1889–1973). American novelist and poet.

A perceptive review by a poet and novelist whose own fictional experiments are of some importance in the development of the 'psychological' novel.

Among contemporary writers of fiction, Mrs Woolf is a curious and anomalous figure. In some respects, she is as 'modern', as radical, as Mr Joyce or Miss Richardson or M. Jules Romains; she is a highly self-conscious examiner of consciousness, a bold and original experimenter

with the technique of novel-writing; but she is also, and just as strikingly, in other respects 'old-fashioned'. This anomaly does not defy analysis. The aroma of 'old-fashionedness' that rises from these highly original and modern novels—from the pages of *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and now again from those of *To the Lighthouse*—is a quality of attitude; a quality, to use a word which is itself nowadays oldfashioned, but none the less fragrant, of spirit. For in this regard, Mrs Woolf is no more modern than Jane Austen: she breathes the same air of gentility, of sequestration, of tradition; of life and people and things all brought, by the slow polish of centuries of tradition and use, to a pervasive refinement in which discrimination, on every conceivable plane, has become as instinctive and easy as the beat of the wing. Her people are 'gentle' people; her houses are the houses of gentlefolk; and the consciousness that informs both is a consciousness of well-being and culture, of the richness and lustre and dignity of tradition; a disciplined consciousness, in which emotions and feelings find their appropriate attitudes as easily and naturally—as *habitually*, one is tempted to say—as a skilled writer finds words.

It is this tightly circumscribed choice of scene—to use 'scene' in a social sense—that gives to Mrs Woolf's novels, despite her modernity of technique and insight, their odd and delicious air of parochialism, as of some small village-world, as bright and vivid and perfect in its tininess as a miniature: a small complete world which time has somehow missed. Going into these houses, one would almost expect to find antimacassars on the chair-backs and daguerreotype albums on the tables. For these people—these Clarissa Dalloways and Mrs Ramsays and Lily Briscoes—are all vibrantly and saturatedly conscious of background. And they all have the curious innocence that accompanies that sort of awareness. They are the creatures of seclusion, the creatures of shelter; they are exquisite beings, so perfectly and elaborately adapted to their environment that they have taken on something of the roundness and perfection of works of art. Their life, in a sense, is a sea-pool life: unruffled and secret: almost, if we can share the cool illusion of the sea-pool's occupants, inviolable. They hear rumours of the sea itself, that vast and terrifying force that lies somewhere beyond them, or around them, but they cherish a sublime faith that it will not disturb them; and if it does, at last, break in upon them with a cataclysmic force, a chaos of disorder and undisciplined violence, they can find no language for the disaster: they are simply bewildered.

But if, choosing such people, and such a *mise en scène*, for her material,

Mrs Woolf inevitably makes her readers think of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, she compels us just as sharply, by her method of evoking them, to think of *Pilgrimage* and *Ulysses* and *The Death of a Nobody*. Mrs Woolf is an excellent critic, an extremely conscious and brilliant craftsman in prose; she is intensely interested in the technique of fiction; and one has at times wondered, so vividly from her prose has arisen a kind of *self-consciousness* of adroitness, whether she might not lose her way and give us a mere series of virtuosities or *tours de force*. It is easy to understand why Katherine Mansfield distrusted 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown'. She felt a kind of sterility in this dexterous holding of the raw stuff of life at arm's length, this playing with it as if it were a toy. Why not be more immediate—why not surrender to it? And one did indeed feel a rather baffling aloofness in this attitude: it was as if Mrs Woolf were a little afraid to come to grips with anything so coarse, preferred to see it through a safe thickness of plate-glass. It was as if she could not be quite at ease with life until she had stilled it, reduced it to the mobile immobility of art—reduced it, even, to such comfortable proportions and orderliness as would not disturb the drawing-room. In *Jacob's Room*, however, and *Mrs Dalloway*, Mrs Woolf began to make it clear that this tendency to sterile dexterity, though pronounced, might not be fatal; and now, in her new novel, *To the Lighthouse*, she relieves one's doubts, on this score, almost entirely.

For, if one still feels, during the first part of this novel almost depressingly, and intermittently thereafter, Mrs Woolf's irritating air as of carrying an enormous technical burden: her air of saying 'See *how* easily I do this!' or 'This is incomparably complex and difficult, but I have the brains for it': nevertheless, one's irritation is soon lost in the growing sense that Mrs Woolf has at last found a complexity and force of theme which is commensurate with the elaborateness and selfconsciousness of her technical 'pattern'. By degrees, one forgets the manner in the matter. One resists the manner, petulantly objects to it, in vain: the moment comes when at last one ceases to be aware of something persistently artificial in this highly feminine style, and finds oneself simply immersed in the vividness and actuality of this world of Mrs Woolf's—believing in it, in fact, with the utmost intensity, and feeling it with that completeness of surrender with which one feels the most moving of poetry. It is not easy to say whether this abdication of 'distance' on the reader's part indicates that Mrs Woolf has now achieved a depth of poetic understanding, a vitality, which was somehow just lacking in the earlier novels, or whether it merely indicates a final triumph of technique. Can

one profitably try to make a distinction between work that is manufactured, bitterly and strenuously, by sheer *will* to imagination, and work that is born of imagination all complete—assuming that the former is, in the upshot, just as convincing as the latter? Certainly one feels everywhere in Mrs Woolf's work this will to imagine, this canvassing of possibilities by a restless and searching and brilliant mind: one feels this mind at work, matching and selecting, rejecting this colour and accepting that, saying, 'It is this that the heroine would say, it is this that she would think'; and nevertheless Mrs Woolf's step is so sure, her choice is so nearly invariably right, and her imagination, even if deliberately willed, is so imaginative, that in the end she makes a beautiful success of it. She makes her Mrs Ramsay—by giving us her stream of consciousness—amazingly alive; and she supplements this just sufficiently, from *outside*, as it were, by giving us also, intermittently, the streams of consciousness of her husband, of her friend Lily Briscoe, of her children: so that we are documented, as to Mrs Ramsay, from every quarter and arrive at a solid vision of her by a process of triangulation. The richness and copiousness and ease, with which this is done, are a delight. These people are astoundingly real: they belong to a special 'class', as Mrs Woolf's characters nearly always do, and exhale a Jane-Austenish aroma of smallness and lostness and incompleteness: but they are magnificently real. We live in that delicious house with them—we feel the minute textures of their lives with their own vivid senses—we imagine with their extraordinary imaginations, are self-conscious with their self-consciousness—and ultimately we know them as well, as terribly, as we know ourselves.

Thus, curiously, Mrs Woolf has rounded the circle. Apparently, at the outset of her work, avoiding any attempt to present life 'immediately', as Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield preferred to do; and choosing instead a medium more sophisticated and conscious, as if she never for a moment wished us to forget the *frame* of the picture, and the fact that the picture *was* a picture; she has finally brought this method to such perfection, or so perfectly allowed it to flower of itself, that the artificial has become natural, the mediate has become immediate. The technical brilliance glows, melts, falls away; and there remains a poetic apprehension of life of extraordinary loveliness. Nothing happens, in this houseful of odd nice people, and yet all of life happens. The tragic futility, the absurdity, the pathetic beauty, of life—we experience all of this in our sharing of seven hours of Mrs Ramsay's wasted or not wasted existence. We have seen, through her, the world.

66. Edwin Muir, review, *Nation and Athenaeum*

2 July 1927, 450

The book referred to in the second sentence was *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann, one of the novels Muir was reviewing at the same time.

To the Lighthouse is a novel difficult to judge. Like the last volume on this list, it stands at the summit of the development of a remarkable writer. Its aim is high and serious, its technique brilliant; there are more beautiful pages in it than Mrs Woolf has written before; a unique intuition and intelligence are at work in it almost continuously, and at high pressure. The difficulties which the author surmounts in it are such as few contemporary novelists would even attempt. Its positive merits are thus very high. Yet as a whole, though showing an advance on many sides, it produces a less congruous and powerful effect than *Mrs Dalloway*. The novel consists of three parts. In the first we have a picture of Mrs Ramsay's summer household in the Hebrides before the war; in the second an imaginative evocation of time passing over the house, deserted now for several years; in the last Mr Ramsay's return as a widower with two of his family and two old friends, the remnant of the large circle which has been reduced in the meantime by death and other causes. In the first book James, a young boy, had been promised that he would be taken to the lighthouse, but it rains, and he cannot go. In the last book—he is a youth now—he goes with his father and his sister, and everything is different. The symbolism is plain enough; but in the novel, so entangled is it with other matters, interesting enough in themselves, that it becomes obscured. Actually it is obscured most by the device which should make it most clear: the intermediary book called 'Time Passes', which, to add to the difficulty, is the best of the lot, and could only have been written by a writer of profound imagination. For this section, composed in a different key, concerned with entities more universal than the human, entities which

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do not need human life, but, affecting everything, affect human life, too, inexorably and yet as if heedlessly, is not a real transition from the first section to the last, both conceived in human terms, but something outside them. The time which passes in this interval passes not for the characters in the story, but for everything; it is a natural, an astronomical, a cosmical transition, and not a human one except incidentally; and the result is that when Mrs Woolf returns to the human plane the sequence seems doubly abrupt. We are not only transported from James's childhood to his youth, we are switched from one dimension of time to another. That this was not the right means to mark the flight of time in this place is shown, I think, by the effect of the third section; for that effect is not intensified, it is, if anything, lessened by what has gone immediately before. Yet one cannot regret that Mrs Woolf wrote the second section in this book. For imagination and beauty of writing it is probably not surpassed in contemporary prose. But how this kind of imagination can be applied, as one feels sure it can, to the business of the novelist, the shadowing forth of human life, is still a problem to be solved.

67. E.M.Forster on Virginia Woolf and Sterne

1927

From *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) (Penguin edition, pp. 26–7).

[Forster compared a passage from 'The Mark on the Wall' (from 'But for that mark' to 'at fifty miles an hour') with chapter XXI, volume 2, of *Tristram Shandy*. He continued:]

The passage last quoted is, of course, out of *Tristram Shandy*. The other passage was from Virginia Woolf She and Sterne are both fantasists.

They start with a little object, take a flutter from it, and settle on it again. They combine a humorous appreciation of the muddle of life with a keen sense of its beauty. There is even the same tone in their voices—a rather deliberate bewilderment, an announcement to all and sundry that they do not know where they are going. No doubt their scales of value are not the same. Sterne is a sentimentalist, Virginia Woolf (except perhaps in her lastest work, *To the Lighthouse*) is extremely aloof. Nor are their achievements on the same scale. But their medium is similar, the same odd effects are obtained by it, the parlour door is never mended, the mark on the wall turns out to be a snail, life is such a muddle, oh dear, the will is so weak, the sensations fidgety ...philosophy...God...oh dear, look at the mark...listen to the door—existence...is really too...what were we saying?

68. J.-E.Blanche, from 'An Interview with Virginia Woolf, *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*

13 August 1927, 1–2

Jacques-Émile Blanche (1861–1942), French painter and writer. He first met Virginia Woolf in Normandy in July 1927 and gave an account of his meeting in this article. A translation of 'Kew Gardens' appeared in the same issue. He corresponded regularly with Virginia Woolf and recommended *Mrs Dalloway* for translation to the publisher Stock. He later reviewed *Orlando* (see Introduction).

For an account of their relationship see G.-P.Collet, 'JacquesÉmile Blanche and Virginia Woolf in *Comparative Literature*, vol. 17, 1965.

This poet, this painter who is attentive to the 'sad quotidian' is the most amusing talker, full of scintillating humour and fun, just like Laforgue. Anyone would love the opportunity of obtaining an audience with this magnetic personality, but it is rarely accorded. The small circle of the Bloomsbury Intelligentsia protects the delicate health of its captive from a public curiosity which fashion increases from year to year, in America as well as in England. One would like to discuss her work with her, but she asks about Marcel Proust and talks about French literature; she enjoys nothing more than reading our authors and incidentally creates a very flattering picture of our country.

'What was Proust like in his youth? Tell me, tell me. How did he make an entry into high society? Society must have understood little of what he wrote?'...

We proceeded to the bottom of the garden to rest in the shadow of the great Normandy trees, the twilight was descending upon Auppegard, the blue sky was paling; it was a time so often described by Mrs Woolf's pen.

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The first part of *To the Lighthouse* ends with a scene of intense emotion between Mr and Mrs Ramsay:

[Quotes pp. 189–91 '"No," she said' to 'she had triumphed again.']

What happens between this first part and the second? Nine short pieces make up this second part, entitled Time Passes. These pieces remind one of Joyce. Less difficult, but just as disconcerting if you are not accustomed to Mrs Woolf's way of thinking.

[Quotes p. 195 '"Well we must wait"' to 'longer than the rest.']

Dear Mrs Woolf, do you wish to create an atmosphere? Is there a hidden meaning there? Don't laugh at me! Then the moon disappears and a fine rain drums on the roof. Are Mr and Mrs Ramsay in the house? The second part does not tell us. They seem to have disappeared like the moon. A chance sentence, and we learn that Mrs Ramsay is dead. We did not even know that the beautiful Mrs Ramsay had been ill. She is eclipsed. But all your characters go away like this after having entered upon the scene unannounced. You assume that your readers are as intelligent as you and as accustomed to seeing into the obscurity and resolving mysteries. Your characters rarely talk amongst themselves. Instead, you give us their internal monologues. Your revolution in the art of narration does not involve the suppression of the conventional role of the author, who is the omniscient, all-seeing God. There remains the novelty and originality of the 'tempo' as Charles du Bos would say, and the fact that you are a painter; that is something I'll take this opportunity of discussing with you. The touches of colour here and there are of a lightness, but also of such incredible precision and density, that they construct the picture, delineate it within an invisible contour. The Impressionist painters proceeded in just this manner. But you would purse your lips, Madame, if I described you as *Impressionist*. One is more up-to-date than that in Bloomsbury. It is only by chance, perhaps, that you are a writer.... *Jacob's Room* and *Mrs Dalloway* are the work of a painter and 'synchronism' and 'futurism' are only labels which people have arbitrarily applied to your style. In *Mrs Dalloway*, a book in which the action begins in the morning and ends in the evening of the same day, you ask us to witness innumerable concomitant episodes, whose only relation to each other exists in your mind. Is it true that at the end, unknown to us, your heroine commits suicide, whilst the madman, after consulting the pompous psychiatrist

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in the afternoon—what a portrait !—puts an end to his frightful anguish? We predicted Mrs Dalloway's suicide. You never confirm it.

The eight little pieces given over to the abandoned house near the Lighthouse are very revealing, as is the interior monologue of Lily Briscoe, the artist, on her return.

She is before her canvas, the easel planted at the place she reoccupies after years of absence. The same refound motif inspires in her the same reflection on aesthetic problems which trouble her: composition; how to distribute the elements of the painting in the space of her canvas? Lily Briscoe is undoubtedly Virginia Woolf herself. I see Berthe Morisot once more, with her meditative face, her silences, her gestures of impatience. The ecstasies and despairs of working from Nature. The questioning of the purpose of it all.

[Quotes pp. 244–5 'and so, lightly and swiftly' to 'Why then did she do it'.]

...There remained many questions that I wished to ask Mrs Woolf about her writing methods. But she pressed me to tell her more about Marcel Proust, about French matters. Night chased us from the garden, Mrs Woolf had to pack her case, she was leaving on the following day for England.

69. Jean-Jacques Mayoux, from a review, *Revue Anglo-Américaine* (Paris)

June 1928, 424–38

It is unfortunately only to the 'happy few' that Virginia Woolf has just given a definitive work which contains all her vision of the world, in which all the delicate beauty of her art is to be found. It is a work so full and so luminous that one is tempted to appreciate it for itself and to explain it by means of itself. Virginia Woolf reminds one of Joyce

and Proust, of Giraudoux and Duhamel. Her fictional method is in some ways close to all the recent techniques, but it is dominated by her sensibility and grace, which are unique.

To the Lighthouse is essentially a lyrical novel; it reflects the contacts of a group of people; contacts between themselves, with things, and with life; and parallel with this it traces in these beings the continuous rhythm of their emotive life. There are no crises in the book; there is no exterior action, nor any interior drama, no conflicts or suppressions, none of those black and hooded figures who prowl watchfully in the penumbra of the unconscious—all that melodramatic paraphernalia of the ultra-modern psychological novel. There are no analyses or depth analyses of obscure motifs; there aren't any motifs at all. *To the Lighthouse* is a long contemplation, a harmonious unwinding of images and emotions, of sentiments and thoughts in an interior world as sweetly luminous as a painting by Vermeer.

Virginia Woolf preserves as much as possible the internal rhythm of the insistent promptings of action and desire; but that does not mean to say—indeed the contrary is true—that she closes the windows and shutters of consciousness, and presents us with a long procession of reveries. Nothing is more real, nothing less arbitrary than this interior movement of characters who are not fabricated in order to pose or demonstrate psychological problems, or in order to enable us to view their personalities at leisure. Neither are these characters simple lyrical themes: without acting, they find a way of living an intense life.

One is at first surprised to see peripheral sensations noted gratuitously, as it were, that is to say without cause or consequence, throughout this movement of thoughts, emotions and images. These sensations are usually not even realised, our consciousness automatically incorporates them into itself, occasionally taking note of them. Virginia Woolf uses these sensations cleverly in order to make a sort of synthesis of the two worlds. In the middle of a sentence which forms an inseparable unity in the unfolding of interior images, she places, she intercalates, a very brief notation of sensation, an object impression around which the two fragments come together—but are found to be tinged with this sensation; in such a way that for a moment we have an impression of adherence to, and diversion from the rhythm, as when a drop of water running along a window pane meets a speck of dust. But the interior life follows its own course according to its own rhythms and fluidity until it meets again the world of objects. As quickly as these contacts are repeated, our memory joins them together in a

sort of continuity and in this way, by very simple means, Virginia Woolf makes us feel the parallel permanence of the outer and inner worlds, their quite separate continuities–so separate that they cannot truly be mixed. In this way she never allows our attention to be detached from the one or the other, or from their contact.

...Virginia Woolf uses to some extent, and only to some extent, the technique of 'telling from the inside'. Nothing is purely objective, altogether outside the characters. Our contacts with the things which constitute their frame, are theirs, taken from the very tissue of their lives. Nevertheless, by a characteristic modification of a rather heavy and graceless technique, we are never 'inside' either. Dialogue, reflections, reveries, everything is almost entirely in the indirect style. And this indirect style spreads its half-tones over the entire book; on the one hand it almost inevitably annexes the short passages of simple narration; but, on the other hand, it holds us at a distance from those interior lives which it allows us to see only across a transparency; instead of, as in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, for example, our being thrown into the very centre of a consciousness which we see teeming around us, monstrously.

Virginia Woolf's characters are not like those sections made in order to 'show the workings'; they are closed, and do not look at us from the corner of their eye when they speak or when they think. They live an astonishingly normal life for themselves, and not for our benefit, and do not even have hidden turpitudes to reveal to us. They discourage dubious familiarities or indiscreet intimacies. The womanly figure who dominates the book with the radiance of her charm and sympathy remains Mrs Ramsay, fine, smiling and serious, a little distant: we do not know her Christian name.

But if Virginia Woolf so places her characters in relation to us in a delicately rectified perspective, it is not to create some new illusionism, it is above all in order that we might have a truer picture of their relationships with each other. And this is one of the essential points of view in the book. It is a characteristic of the vision–perhaps of the *feminine* vision of the author–she would not repudiate the adjective–that she sees human beings not separated, but in a group; and also characteristic is her inclination to be concerned less with their internal construction than with the reciprocal contacts between human beings, and their ability to create such *rapports*.

...Such they are, reunited by evening around the Ramsays' table–assembled solitudes. They are men, and for Virginia Woolf this

retrenchment into the self is an especially masculine characteristic. This is revealed perfectly in their relations with things: they do not liberate enough of themselves in order to embrace things entirely: they transform the immense richness of concrete objects into useful tokens which are easy to handle. They have lost the faculty of direct and complete emotive contact with the world: what they handle, in their theories, their opinions, their vision of life, is a universal algebra.

...The dinner at last becomes all rhythmic movement and collective emotion.

And when William Bankes and Carmichael and Ramsay and even Tansley, released from their individuality, from their peculiarities, make a kind of unity together, it is then that they truly defend against the worst danger, an ever-menacing decomposition, that which is most precious, their common humanity. This is the profound meaning of Mrs Ramsay's effort, it is in this way that this supremely harmonious moment is not only beauty, but also wisdom. They will pass, but the order, the harmony which exists between them at this moment, is permanent, eternal, placed outside of time and change, like all perfect communion, all order, all harmony.

Mrs Ramsay goes up to the children's room, and again is found dispensing her grace, calming their nerves, cradling them with the music of words and images; and the final task accomplished, she suddenly feels weary; and then begins one of the characteristic alternations in the rhythm of the book: a return, a descent.

...'This would remain' thought Mrs Ramsay, of that moment full of humanity. And thereupon time passes; and it is like the complete reversal of the plan of the book, a new test of values. There are small and great convulsions: the death of Mrs Ramsay, and that of her daughter, and the war, in which her son is killed. The renewal is of an order which is therefore made precarious by the chaos in the Ramsay house and in the world, and everything passes just like sand trickling between one's fingers. Except for a few pages of rather conventional lyricism on the progress of the disorder in the house—one cannot help thinking of the 'Sensitive Plant'—everything takes place between brackets, with a sentence for each happening. The change, the decomposition seem so negative that even afterwards one does not know what is more unreal, that which used to be or this dissolution which has seized it. And Lily Briscoe who painted the house and the garden ten years ago, with Mrs Ramsay and the child James at the window of the sitting-room—it must have been a very different composition when she was sitting there with James: it must

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have cast a shadow—Lily finds herself one morning in the reopened house. By a new reversal, the design of this part becomes parallel again to that of the first (the second being, as it were, perpendicular to them). We fall again into the relative immobility of things, into a completely interior movement. Lily's thought dominates this second moment as that of Mrs Ramsay had the first.

She is at first struck, at that hour when things have not yet any vibration or colour and the spirit has not re-formed its habits, by the unreality of the things which surround her. 'The house, the place, the morning all seemed strangers to her.'

Finding herself thus without links with the present, not finding there the imprint of her actions or emotions, failing to see it disposed according to the order to which her former habits had accustomed her, Lily does not recognise the present. She discovers that she is lost and at the same time feels, in this place with which all the past was associated and which now seems scarcely to contain its dust, how perfectly the past is dead both there and in herself.

Lost between the present and the past, doubly deprived of order and solidity, doubly adrift, Lily will force herself to a two-fold reconstruction in order to return in possession of the two worlds. There is a welcome consequence to all this: by subtle modifications, a gradual evolution, this spiritual condition gives birth to its contrary. This condition is first of all a disarray mingling with an impression of the chaotic incoherence of things; without the cause—the absence of a common term between subject and object—being conscious: a single being is lost to us and all the world is unpeopled. But it is also a state of appeal, an inspiration infinitely richer than the ordinary moments when the interior life passes by in transit.

Lily paints and remembers—a rich and symbolic alternation which moves across all this part of the book. She thinks of Charles Tansley, of his harsh words, of his gauche and graceless egoism. She calls up the caricatural simplification which she has made of him; and here, all of a sudden, instead of a caricature, she has refound a living being. But at the same time she finds Mrs Ramsay again, whom she had not been looking for. Or is it that Lily did not look for her obscurely, and precisely in the way she should be looked for, not in herself, but in those who surrounded her and whom she irradiated with her grace?

[Quotes pp. 247–50 'And then, she reflected' to 'Life stand still here, Mrs Ramsay said.']

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I have quoted at length the passage which seems to me to express, better than any other, the central message of the book.

...'Like a work of art' thinks Lily, and here is formulated the assimilation prefigured and prepared for throughout that meditation by the constant symbolic interlacing of memory and the effort of plastic creation. There are two ways of making something permanent of the moment. But how different, even antagonistic, the concrete and direct emotive unity, which Mrs Ramsay creates in living, and the plastic and architectural unity, abstract and austere, towards which Lily strives. This involves the complete transformation, the pitiless sacrifice of even the dearest emotional values: she cannot, as she had already explained to William Bankes, make of Mrs Ramsay anything but a violet shadow. And Virginia Woolf expresses the transmutation by one of her delightful foreshortenings: during the dinner, Lily, thinking of her painting, decides to modify her composition, to move a tree towards the right, and symbolically, moves a salt cellar on the tablecloth. Now, ten years after, thinking of Mrs Ramsay's efforts to throw her into the current of life, she remembers: 'She had been looking at the table-cloth, and it had flashed upon her that she would move the tree to the middle, and need never marry anybody, and she had felt an enormous exultation.'

The evocation of the past follows the very movement of the past and with a subtle symmetry, refinds what I have called the curve of Mrs Ramsay: there is the same creation of a common identity and the same return to silence. Lily thinks, moreover, how the present is an ironic negation of the past, forbidding its resuscitation, since it is no longer active. The present puts the past in its place and situates it as something immobile, powerless, fixed and frozen:

> But the dead, thought Lily, encountering some obstacle in her design which made her pause and ponder, stepping back a foot or so, Oh the dead! she murmured, one pitied them, one brushed them aside, one had even a little contempt for them. They are at our mercy. Mrs Ramsay has faded and gone.... Mockingly she seemed to see her there at the end of the corridor of years saying, of all incongruous things, 'Marry, marry!'.... And one would have to say to her, It has all gone against your wishes. They're happy like that; I'm happy like this. Life has changed completely. At that all her being, even her beauty, became for a moment, dusty and out of date.

Lily quickly finds her vision again; but it is really this oscillation rather than the still point of her joy which is the pivot of the moment: she can

find Mrs Ramsay again, rediscover her grace like a gift of eternity, and yet that grace, formerly sovereign, is for ever powerless.

And when the vision pales and passes, it seems to Lily's distant gaze that Mrs Ramsay is distanced on the sea. But at that place there is only a boat in which Ramsay, his son James, and his daughter Cam move away towards the Lighthouse.

Lily sees them going away, and here a new alternation begins within her, between her vision which journeys into the past and they who pass away into the distance. All this part is dominated by the assimilation of time and death, in their effects on human sentiments, into distance: it is a question of perspective.

And in subtle antiphony, Lily's thought on the shore corresponds with Cam's thought in the boat, in such a way that we are constantly transported from one to the other.

Lily looks at the boat fading, becoming unreal. Cam thinks 'how all those paths and the lawn, thick and knotted with the lives they have lived there, were gone: were rubbed out; were past; were unreal, and now this was real; the boat and the sail with its patch...'

And on the shore: 'So much depends then,' thought Lily Briscoe, looking at the sea which had scarcely a stain on it...'so much depends', she thought, 'upon distance: whether people are near us or far from us; for her feeling for Mr Ramsay changed as he sailed further and further across the bay. It seemed to be elongated, stretched out; he seemed to become more and more remote.'

And this insistence on perspective, this assimilation of death and distance, would certainly not have anything really original about it independently of the grace and freshness of Virginia Woolf's vision, without, precisely, this ironic antiphony. This impression of unreality, being reciprocal, a passing which takes place in two senses at the same time, becomes absurdly illusory. And the more we feel it to be illusory, the more we feel it tyrannically inevitable, mistress of all our human relations.

This work which has no apparent articulations, we have found to be totally coherent, a combination of equilibrium and subtle correspondences.

It makes one think at first of Classical music, with its perfect balance of emotion and of form, it subtle but perfectly clear interweaving of themes, and its motifs which return, sometimes at very long intervals, but which one recognises with a delicate pleasure.

It has, moreover, something more solid than any music and it has

adopted a different symbolism. When Lily Briscoe seeks to reconstruct her vision from a wedge of space, balances her lines and her masses one against the other—a light here needs a shadow there—one realises that this is also what Virginia Woolf is doing; I have compared her with Vermeer; but Vermeer is too straightforward; it is rather of Cézanne that she should remind us, Cézanne taking his forms from Nature, and imposing his form upon them, making them enter into a purely personal composition. She follows the movements, the rhythms of life; she transcribes them with an intense reality; but she integrates them into the movement and the rhythm of her thoughts and thus assigns new values to them beyond their original value, and makes symbols of them. She is Lily Briscoe making a work of art with the substance of Mrs Ramsay.