

## ABSTRACT

Virginia Woolf's novels are considered to be amongst the treasures of modernist literature. Revising the conventional realist novel, Woolf explores new techniques in her writings to examine and expand the notions of art, experimenting with her portrayal of time and space and of consciousness and reality. The influence of art critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell were crucial to these explorations, especially in connection to visual arts and aesthetics more generally.

This project explores Woolf's application and reinterpretation of Fry and Bell's aesthetics and analyzes her contemplation on art through the lens. Three central questions are constantly reviewed: What is art? How are works of art created? And what are the justification for and significance of art? Specifically, it sets up two frameworks, namely the contrast between "actual life and imaginative life" and between "vision and design," based on Fry's *Vision and Design* and Bell's *Art*. It discusses how Woolf's own theory of art emerges in *To the Lighthouse* and *Between the Acts* from her use and revision of Fry and Bell as she provides their formal frameworks with historical context that focuses on the position of women and the female artist.

**“Beneath the colour there was the shape”:  
Clive Bell, Roger Fry and Artistic Vision in *To the Lighthouse***

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## INTRODUCTION

In her 1924 essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” Virginia Woolf famously writes, “in or about December, 1910, human character changed” (2). In a characteristic form of coterie signaling, Woolf refers here to the groundbreaking art exhibition, “Manet and the Post-Impressionists,” which was organized by Roger Fry and other Bloomsbury members in the Grafton Galleries, London, from November 8th, 1910, to January 15th, 1911. This exhibition and Fry and another Bloomsbury member Clive Bell’s aesthetics were very influential on Woolf and were instrumental in changing her writing style.

Fry had first coined the word “post-impressionism” in 1906 to describe a mainly French art movement that developed both out of impressionism and after it. In contrast to the impressionists, Fry argues, the artists he terms “post-impressionist” strive to express the essence of life and human emotions through more distorted forms and often arbitrary colors rather than seeking to represent the appearance of objects to the observing eye. The exhibition sought to be an educational as well as an aesthetic experience through the careful arrangement of the paintings. Fry placed near the entrance, in the Octagonal Gallery, the paintings of Edouard Manet and Paul Cezanne to help the viewers understand the transition to post-impressionism. Then beginning with the second gallery, the Large Gallery, and finishing with the End Gallery, Fry hung the more unconventional pictures by painters like Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso, Vincent Van Gogh, and Henri Matisse whose bold themes, colors, and designs occupied the walls (“Manet and the Post-Impressionists”).

This bewildering exhibition shocked the London public who were accustomed to more conventional mimetic representations of the world through perspective, shape, and color. After

her first visit to the exhibition, Woolf seemed less than impressed, describing it in a letter written just after its opening as “a modest simple set of painters, innocent even of indecency,” and going on to remark that “I don’t think them so good as books” (*Letters*, vol. 1, 440). However, very quickly she began to ponder this new art and its aesthetics, especially in relation to the ideas of her circle and to her own aesthetic practice. Many of her family members and friends were active organizers of the exhibition. As well as Fry, Desmond MacCarthy was the secretary of the exhibition and wrote the introduction to the catalogue; her sister, Vanessa Bell’s artistic style was substantially influenced by encountering the post-impressionist painters, especially Matisse, and four of her paintings were exhibited at *The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* of 1912; Clive Bell, Vanessa’s husband since 1907, was an influential art critic who advocated for this “new” art; and Woolf’s own husband, Leonard Woolf, acted as the secretary for the second exhibition. Woolf herself responded powerfully to the exhibition and to Fry and Bell’s systematizing of its aesthetics.

Woolf met Fry in 1910 and over the next decade became increasingly influenced by him and his ideas. In December 1918, for example, she writes that “Roger & I get on very well now; more genuine & free than we were, under the shadow of Gordon Square” (*Diary*, vol. 1, 225). She goes on to say they discussed Edward Wolfe’s picture that “The question is about a slice of green on the midmost apple. Does it interpose with the violet on the edge of the potato?” (*Diary*, vol. 1, 225). In March 1921, the Hogarth Press, founded by Woolf and her husband, published her short story collection *Monday or Tuesday*, with four woodcuts by Vanessa. This collection contained eight stories, including one entitled “Blue & Green,” which was a deliberate exploration of Cezanne’s characteristic use of “green and blue,” in verbal rather than visual terms (*Letters*, vol. 2, 15). In 1927, two days after the publication of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf



wrote to Fry saying “you have I think kept me on the right path, so far as writing goes, more than anyone—if the right path it is” (*Letters*, vol. 3, 285). In August 1938, three years before her death, Woolf begins a biography of Fry who had died in 1934 and in her notes writes “So to the Post Is. [Post Impressionists] & ourselves. That will make the break in the book. A change of method.” The “change of method” refers both to her own writing method and to the aesthetic change brought by Fry (*Diary*, vol. 5, 160).

Clive Bell, Fry’s friend and Vanessa’s husband, was the other significant art critic in the Bloomsbury circle for Woolf. In his 1914 book, *Art*, he developed a theory of “significant form” to explain and popularize the aesthetics behind the post-impressionist art exhibition. Indeed, both Fry and Bell were instrumental in what Woolf calls her “change of method” heralded by the publication of her short story, “Kew Gardens” in 1919 and which came to fruition in *To The Lighthouse* where she explicitly addresses Bell’s and Fry’s aesthetics and the relation between verbal and visual art.

*To the Lighthouse* is probably Woolf’s most autobiographical novel as it describes the domestic life of the Ramsays and their friends during their visit to their holiday home overlooked by a lighthouse in the Isle of Skye in Scotland. Woolf spent her childhood summers with her family in Cornwall in a house similarly overlooked by a lighthouse. The identical numbers of the children raised by the Ramsays and Woolf’s parents, Leslie and Julia Stephen, the resemblance between the characteristics of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and Woolf’s parents, the likeness of Lily Briscoe, the painter, to aspects of both Woolf and Vanessa, the various events in the novel, and the location of the story all reveal its semi-autobiographical nature. Indeed, in a letter to Woolf shortly after the novel’s publication, Vanessa wrote: “anyhow it seemed to me in the first part of

the book you have given a portrait of mother which is more like her than anything I could ever have conceived of as possible” (*Letters*, vol. 3, 572).

Both Fry and Bell’s ideas and influence are clearly visible in the two central female characters in *To the Lighthouse*, the older mother, Mrs. Ramsay, and the younger painter, Lily Briscoe. Through their portrayal Woolf explores ideas about the creation and purpose of art, culminating in Lily completing her painting of Mrs. Ramsay reading to her youngest son, James --a painting which the novel makes clear is post-impressionistic in style. Furthermore, Woolf saw the novel as, in many ways, an “elegy” to her mother and Lily’s painting, in turn, becomes at the end of the novel a “tribute” to the now dead Mrs. Ramsay (*Diary*, vol. 3, 34; *Lighthouse* 56).

When we first meet Lily in section four of “The Window,” sitting at her easel, Woolf immediately describes Lily’s vision and aesthetic ideas in ways that explicitly echo Bell’s and Fry’s ideas:

She would not have considered it honest to tamper with the bright violet and the staring white, since she saw them like that, fashionable though it was, since Mr. Paunceforte’s visit, to see everything pale, elegant, semitransparent. Then beneath the colour there was the shape. She could see it all 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 the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child.  
(*Lighthouse* 22-23)

Her perception of the jacmanna and the wall as “bright violet” and “staring white” correspond to Fry and Bell’s emphasis on the centrality of colors. Lily’s belief that “then beneath the color there was the shape” repeats their concern over the relations of lines and masses. Her ability to see colors and shapes “beneath” the appearance of nature and artificial buildings suggests Fry’s claim that a work of art is generated from the artists’ vision of what he calls the “imaginative life” and that it grants the viewers access to an “essential reality” that lies “beneath” appearance.

The intense word “demons” echoes Bell’s emphasis on the artists’ *passionate* apprehension of perception as the source of creative compulsion. Finally, both Fry and Bell talk of the difficulty of creating a work of art and privilege the artist over the critic which manifest themselves in Lily’s fear about her ability to make the “passage from conception to work.”

Woolf uses the progress of Lily’s painting as a consistent link to organize the novel, both in terms of structure and content. For example, when Mrs. Ramsay unites her family members and friends together at the dinner party towards the end of the first part “The Window,” Lily works out the structural design that enables her to connect the different parts in her painting, and when Mr. Ramsay arrives at the lighthouse at the end of the novel, Lily completes her painting and concludes, “I have had my vision” (*Lighthouse* 211). In short, Lily’s painting of Mrs. Ramsay as the subject of her picture, her thinking about her painting, the act of painting itself, and the completed picture are the crucial ways in which Woolf uses Fry and Bell’s aesthetic ideas to explore the value and purpose of art and to formulate her own aesthetic principles and practice.

In the first chapter, I will set up two frameworks based on Fry and Bell’s aesthetics that are applied to Woolf’s works later. The second chapter examines Mrs. Ramsay’s three attempts at artistic creation associated with the notion of “aesthetic vision.” The third chapter centers on Lily and how she as an artist and an individual woman has “creative vision” and completes her work of art. In the end, the epilogue discusses Woolf’s final work *Between the Acts* as her return to Fry and Bell near the end of her life.

## CHAPTER ONE: TWO FRAMEWORKS

Three questions are central to Fry, Bell, and Woolf: What is art? How are works of art created? And what are the justification for and significance of art? In 1914 Bell charted his aesthetics in his work of criticism, *Art*, and in 1920 Fry published a collection of his art criticism which he called *Vision and Design*.

In *Art*, Clive Bell attempts to “develop a complete theory of visual art” (v). Throughout the book, he proposes and elucidates two major hypotheses that form his theory. He asserts first, that “the essential quality in a work of art is significant form” and, second, “significant form is the expression of a peculiar emotion felt for reality” (Bell 100). This peculiar emotion he terms “aesthetic emotion,” and he defines the objects that provoke aesthetic emotion as works of art (Bell 6-7). This “peculiar emotion felt for reality,” he goes on to say, leads humans to “attach greater importance to the spiritual than to the material significance of the universe . . . it disposes men to feel things as ends instead of merely recognising them as means . . . [This] sense of reality is, in fact, the essence of spiritual health” (Bell 101). Bell distinguishes two types of significance--material significance and spiritual significance. Many people, Bell claims, only use their eyes to collect information and to pick up facts (81). They fail to appreciate works of art because they are too obsessed with the practical functions of objects in real life to perceive the essential forms and emotions of these forms (Bell 81). When spectators become focussed on this factual truth, they lose their potential to respond to art as art. Similarly, when painters concentrate their energy on factual truth they only produce “descriptive painting,” a mere

imitation where forms are used simply as “means of *suggesting* emotion or conveying information” (Bell 16, 17; emphasis added).

The other type of significance is what Bell designates spiritual significance. To appreciate or create works of art, Bell argues that objects must be seen not as a means to an end, but “as ends in themselves” (52). To see a thing as an end in itself, he continues, means it is stripped of all its contingent associations and leaves the thing in itself, which is what provokes the “aesthetic emotion” (53). Furthermore, this thing in itself is what he calls a thing’s “ultimate reality” (Bell 54). This “ultimate reality” reveals itself through pure forms and, by so doing, provides what he sees as an object’s “essential truth.” By being able to see in paintings an object’s “essential truth,” spectators perceive the “aesthetic emotion” in a work of art and, accordingly, can appreciate the work of art as an end in itself. Therefore, Bell argues, artists are those who possess the power of “surely and frequently seizing reality (generally behind pure form), and the power of expressing his sense of it, in pure form” (57). This reality, for Bell, is the “essence” that is manifested in pure forms. Again and again in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf returns to the idea of “essential truths” that reveal themselves through forms.

Fry similarly makes a distinction between material and spiritual life in *Vision and Design*. From the beginning, Fry separates the development of art from the progress of history. Surveying art trends alongside their contemporaneous social developments, Fry concludes by saying that “we find the rhythmic sequences of change determined much more by its own internal forces—and by the readjustment within it, or its own element—than by external forces” (9). He views these internal forces as being spiritual in nature. Indeed, throughout the book, Fry constantly asserts his belief that art is “one of the chief organs of what, for want of a better word, I must call the spiritual life” (55).

Like Bell, Fry sets up two types of life: one he calls “actual life” or “real life,” and the other he terms “imaginative life” or “spiritual life.” The former operates in a world of external forces whereas the second reveals with workings of an internal spirit and is exemplified by art. For Fry, “actual life” is everyday life where humans are subject to responding to natural instincts (17). In his formulation, Fry leans heavily on Darwinism which “designates a distinctive form of evolutionary explanation for the history and diversity of life on earth” and which argues that to fulfill a species’ tendency to increase in numbers over generations, favorable variations that grant them advantages in the struggle for survival are more likely to be passed on and thus preserved (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Humans, similarly, inherit certain reproductively advantageous characteristics through this process of natural selection. When presented to the human senses, many objects in the world, Fry states, “put in motion a complex nervous machinery, which ends in some instinctive appropriate action” (17). He uses as an example a person encountering a wild bull in a field and fleeing instinctively. The nervous mechanism causes the emotion of fear which leads to involuntary flight (Fry 17). For the majority of “actual life,” Fry argues, human consciousness bends towards such instinctive reactions and their consciousness focuses on the emotions caused by such instincts (18).

In contrast to this “actual life,” Fry positions what he terms “imaginative life,” which frees humans from their evolutionary instincts to a certain extent. For Fry, humans are capable of “calling up in [their] mind the echo of the past experience” and “of going it over again, ‘in imagination,’” and so, unlike animals, they have the potential to remove themselves from instinctual responses (17-18). Using the relatively new form of film, Fry points out that films resemble “actual life” almost completely except that “the appropriate resultant action is cut off” (18). When the spectators see a runaway horse and cart on film, Fry observes, they do not think

of fleeing because they are aware of their distance from real danger. Instead, they are granted more leisure to notice things that are irrelevant to their immediate survival and that cannot come into their consciousness when they encounter a runaway horse and cart in real life (Fry 18). In other words, in “actual life” humans are actors who are engaged in real-life drama and who see “only so much as may help [them move] to the appropriate actions” (Fry 19). In contrast, in “imaginative life” they can be spectators who become aware of a much wider set of things (Fry 19). The perception brought on by “imaginative life,” Fry says, enables clearer consciousness of their emotions, even though those emotions are weaker (19). For example, if an accident is presented on the screen, the spectators’ pity and horror is weaker because they know the accident is not real, but their consciousness of the particularities of these emotions is purer because they are not immediately transformed into instinctual actions (Fry 19). For Fry, this type of perception is a defining characteristic of “imaginative life” (18, 19).

Accordingly, Fry concludes that art “is an expression and a stimulus of this imaginative life, which is separated from actual life by the absence of responsive action” (20). He counters the theorists who view graphic art as mere imitation by considering art as “an expression of emotions regarded as ends in themselves” (Fry 29). Since it stems from imaginative life and presents imaginative life, art is “freed from the binding necessities of our actual existence” and, therefore, it allows humans to see “what things really look like” (Fry 21, 25). And unlike actual life where responsive actions imply larger moral responsibilities to the group and where emotions are valued by the actions they produce, art is dissociated from morality and it considers emotion “in and for itself” (Fry 21, 27). Like religion, art corresponds, for Fry, to “certain spiritual capacities of human nature, the exercise of which is in itself good and desirable apart from their effect upon real life” (22).

Fry's notion that art reveals "what things really look like" hinges on a distinction he makes between truth and beauty, and he articulates two types of truth and beauty respectively. The first type of truth is what he terms "factual truth," which he sometimes abbreviates as fact, and the other is "essential truth," which he often calls simply essence. Similarly, he classifies beauty in two: "natural beauty" and "aesthetic beauty." Bell makes a similar distinction between these two types of truth and beauty. Natural beauty, sometimes called material beauty, refers to the beauty experienced through natural objects. "There is beauty in Nature," Fry admits, "that is to say, certain objects constantly do, and perhaps any object may, compel us to regard it with that intense disinterested contemplation that belongs to the imaginative life, and which is impossible to the actual life of necessity and action" (37). For example, spectators may observe a sunset or a horse without involuntary instinctual responses and consider them beautiful. Similarly, Bell distinguishes the beauty in a butterfly or a flower from the beauty in a painting or sculpture. However, Bell claims that the emotions most spectators feel when looking at natural objects is different from those they feel when looking at works of art (13). Bell and Fry associate this natural beauty with "factual truth" and "actual life." For them, descriptive paintings belong to this category of beauty since they are valued for conveying information and suggesting emotions indirectly through their successful imitation of natural objects.

"Aesthetic beauty" refers to the beauty experienced through works of art. Here Fry again returns to notions of the end in itself rather than means to an end as he writes, "in objects created to arouse the aesthetic feeling we have an added consciousness of purpose on the part of the creator, that he made it on purpose not to be used but to be regarded and enjoyed; and that this feeling is characteristic of the aesthetic judgment proper" (37). The main difference between material beauty and aesthetic beauty, then, is that the former lacks aesthetic intention, in contrast



to the latter which is produced specifically for aesthetic enjoyment. Bell also distinguishes the emotions experienced from natural objects from those experienced from aesthetic objects, and he defines aesthetic beauty tautologically as the “combinations of lines and colours that provoke aesthetic emotion” (12).

Unlike the often incompatible relationships between Bell’s material and spiritual significance and Fry’s actual and imaginative life, and between factual and essential truth, material beauty and aesthetic beauty are not necessarily irreconcilable. The sources of material beauty, natural objects, can be the sources of aesthetic beauty if combined with aesthetic intention. Fry states, “when the artist passes from pure sensations to emotions aroused by means of sensations, he uses natural forms which, in themselves, are calculated to move our emotions, and he presents these in such a manner that the forms themselves generate in us emotional states, based upon the fundamental necessities of our physical and physiological nature” (37). In other words, the essential forms of natural objects are often the fundamental materials for artists, but it is their presentation in art that reveals their essential form. Bell also charts a similar causal chain: “For what, then, does the artist feel the emotion that he is supposed to express? Sometimes it certainly comes to him through material beauty. The contemplation of natural objects is often the immediate cause of the artist’s emotion” (50). For Bell, artists perceive natural objects “as pure forms in certain relations to each other, and feels emotion for them as such” (51). What non-artists perceive in works of art--aesthetic beauty defined as “pure forms in relation to each other”--artists can perceive in natural objects. There is a circular argument here: to perceive essential truth is to perceive pure forms and to perceive pure forms is to perceive essential truth, and the perception of essential truth and pure forms is a necessary and sufficient condition for understanding aesthetic beauty.

At the center of Bell's and Fry's theories then are the idea of artistic vision and artistic design, the terms which provide the title of Fry's book, *Vision and Design*. In the book, Fry categorizes visions into four kinds—"prophetic vision," "curious vision," "aesthetic vision," and "creative vision." The first, prophetic vision, corresponds to "actual life" as humans learn to read prophetic, or practical, messages in the natural world to avert disaster and threat, and ignore any other characteristic in natural objects (Fry 48). Fry uses as his example, how humans in a field in the wild concentrate on the traces of dangerous animals and ignore objects like flowers or butterflies, unless those objects are signs of potential danger or safety. The second vision, curious vision, is an "unbiological, disinterested vision" where a human "still looks at flowers, and does not merely see them. He also keeps objects which have some marked peculiarity of appearance that catches his eye" (Fry 48). This curious vision is distinct from prophetic vision because the prophetic vision ceases as soon as it fulfills its practical functions, while curious vision contemplates the objects with no immediate link to actual or instinctual life (Fry 48). Curious vision begins to lead the human into "imaginative life."

Both the third and fourth vision characterize imaginative life. The third, aesthetic vision, exists when spectators "look at objects not even for their curiosity or oddity, but for their harmony of form and colour. To arouse such a vision the object must be more than a 'curio': it has to be a work of art" (Fry 49). Aesthetic vision emerges when spectators see, in Fry's words, "harmony of form and color," a phrase that echoes Bell's own definition of "significant form" as harmonic "combinations of lines and colours" (Fry 49; Bell 12). This aesthetic vision, then, is associated with imaginative life, essential truth, and aesthetic beauty.

Fry's fourth and culminating vision he terms "creative vision," which enables the true artist to perceive pure and essential harmony in almost any object. Creative vision, according to Fry,

demands the most complete detachment from any of the meanings and implications of appearances. Almost any turn of the kaleidoscope of nature may set up in the artist this detached and impassioned vision, and, as he contemplates the particular field of vision, the (aesthetically) chaotic and accidental conjunction of forms and colours begins to crystallise into a harmony; ... Similarly colours, which in nature have almost always a certain vagueness and elusiveness, become so definite and clear to him, owing to their own necessary relation to other colours, that if he chooses to paint his vision he can state them positively and definitely. (51)

Both Fry and Bell differentiate the appreciative spectator from the creative artist: spectators can only perceive harmony of lines and colors from works of art while artists are able to access aesthetic beauty from any object. What comes along with this creative vision, what Bell calls "a passionate apprehension of form," is the emotion felt by the artists for the harmony of pure forms (51). For Bell, these are their "moments of inspiration" and their art "follows the desire to express what has been felt" (52). Aesthetic vision can be distinguished from creative vision in the following way: the former is received by spectators who can and can only *perceive* harmony of lines and colors from *works of art*, while the latter is performed by artists who are able to perceive the harmony of pure forms more definitely and clearly from mundane materials and can transform that perception into artistic creation.

Yet it takes enormous effort for artists to transform this vision into a flawless design. Whether artists can create significant form after experiencing their vision, Bell argues, is "the question of the artistic problem, and it is really a technical question" (63). The immediate problem of the artist is how to "express himself within a square or a circle or a cube, to balance certain harmonies ... or to conquer certain difficulties of medium" (Bell 66). It is through solving

these specific problems that artists can create their design. To the end, they must “canalise their emotion, they must concentrate their energies on some definite problem” (Bell 64). It often takes artists several attempts to establish their harmonious design, but “if their work is to be a success there will come a moment in which the artist will be able to hold and express completely his hour or minute of inspiration” (Bell 231). The key to reaching the moment, for Bell, is “this masterful power of seizing and holding his vision” (231). In other words, when artists have their “creative vision,” it requires them to solve specific “artistic problems,” and by so doing they are able to create their “significant form,” or design.

For both Bell and Fry what makes an aesthetically beautiful design is firstly purposeful order. One chief aspect of order in a work of art, Fry states, “is unity,” which allows spectators to view the work as a whole and “contemplate it in its entirety” (31). There are two kinds of effective unity in works of art. The first is “collective unity” which is achieved when the attractions of the eye are balanced “about the central line of the picture” so that the eye can willingly rest within the bound of the work and perceive several attractions simultaneously (Fry 31). The second is “successive unity” as when “a landscape is painted upon a roll of silk so long that we can only look at it in successive segments. ... when this is well done, we have received a very keen impression of pictorial unity” (Fry 32-33). As Fry states, “It depends upon the forms being presented to us in such a sequence that each successive element is felt to have a fundamental and harmonious relation with that which preceded it” (33). Similar successive unity, he believes, is familiar to literature and music (Fry 33).

For artists to pass from the stage of merely satisfying the spectators’ demand for order to them being able to arouse “aesthetic emotion” through reproducing their “creative vision,” Fry argues that these six elements are essential: line; mass; space; light and shade; color; and the

angle of the plane. The first element is the “rhythm of the line with which the forms are delineated” (Fry 33). According to Fry, a drawn line is the “record of a gesture,” modified by the artists’ feelings that is thus delivered to the spectators directly (33). The second is mass: “When an object is so represented that we recognise it as having inertia we feel its power of resisting movement, or communicating its own movement to other bodies, and our imaginative reaction to such an image is governed by our experience of mass in actual life” (Fry 33-34). The third is space. Fry states that the same-sized square on two pieces of paper can be manipulated easily to represent different areas, and the spectators’ reaction to it is proportionately changed (34). The fourth is light and shade. Even towards the same objects, the spectators’ feelings can be different corresponding to variously illuminated backgrounds (Fry 34). The fifth is color, which has a direct emotional effect that is evident from the connection between the words like gay, dull, melancholy and particular colors (Fry 34). The sixth, which may not be necessary according to Fry, is the “inclination to the eye of a plane, whether it is impending over or leaning away from us” (34).

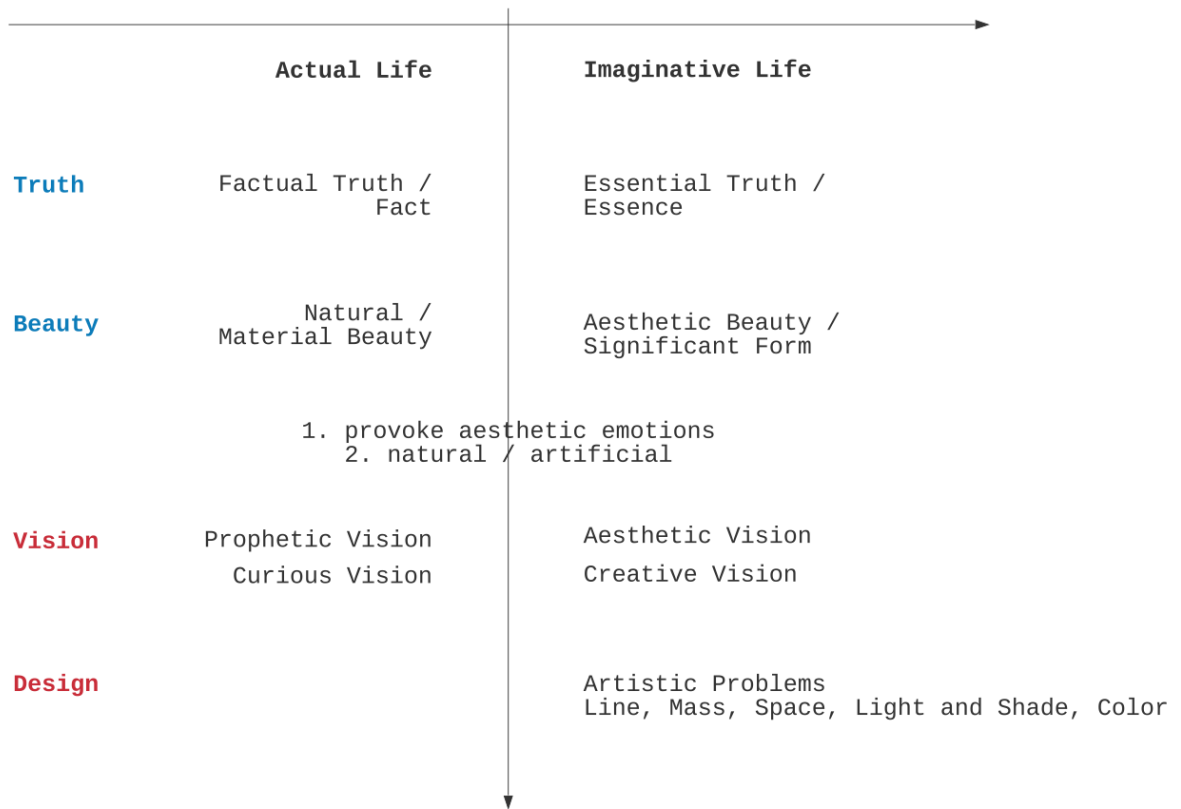
These six elements of design, Fry states, are all connected with essential conditions of humans’ physical existence:

rhythm appeals to all the sensations which accompany muscular activity; mass to all the infinite adaptations to the force of gravity which we are forced to make; the spatial judgment is equally profound and universal in its application to life; our feeling about inclined planes is connected without necessary judgments about the conformation of the earth itself; light again, is so necessary a condition of our existence that we become intensely sensitive to changes in its intensity.  
(35)

Therefore, Fry concludes, the graphic arts arouse emotions by playing upon “the overtones of some of our primary physical needs” (35). He then compares these visual arts to poetry and argues that they have a considerable advantage over poetry because “they can appeal more

directly and immediately to the emotional accompaniments of our bare physical existence” (Fry 35).

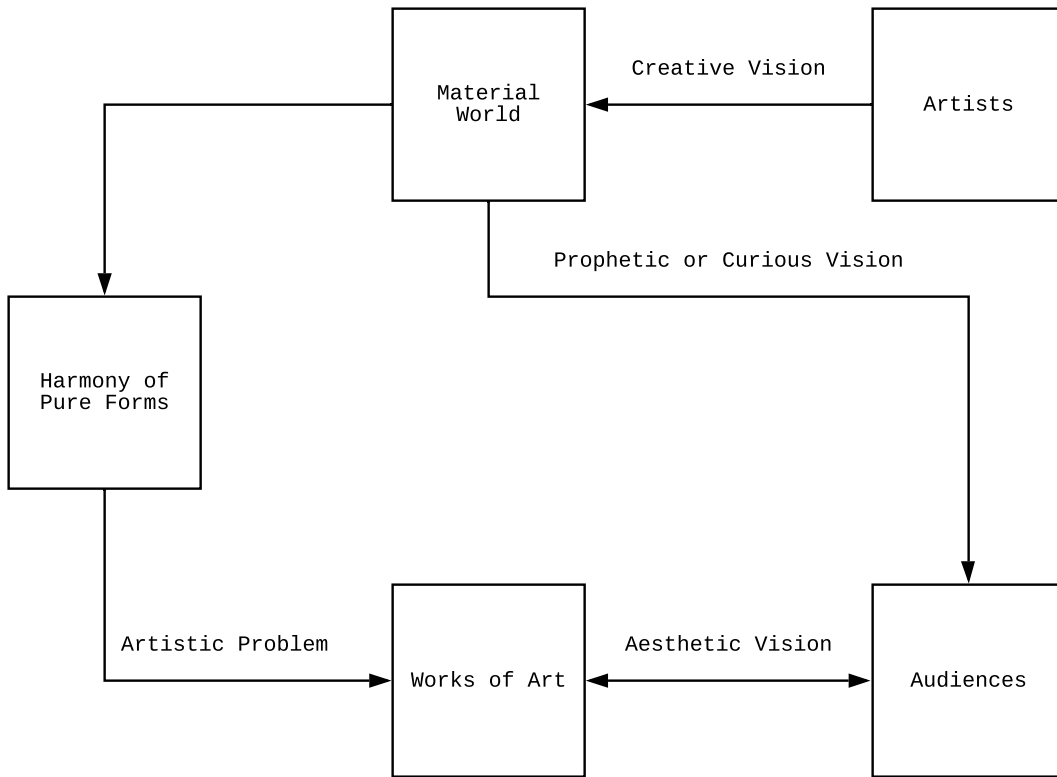
The next two chapters chart how Woolf explores Fry and Bell’s aesthetics in *To the Lighthouse* primarily through the characters of Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Crucially, the book provides Bell’s and Fry’s formal frameworks with historical context that focuses on the position of women. Mrs. Ramsay is chiefly associated with Fry’s “aesthetic vision” and is unable to achieve genuine “creative vision” because of her commitment to matrimonial ideology. In contrast, Lily achieves her “creative vision” and completes her painting in the end. Finally, Woolf suggests the purpose of art and the fundamental aesthetic emotion is linked to mourning and memory.



FRAMEWORK A

1. Based on Fry and Bell's theories and for the convenience of later examination and analysis in the paper, three main elements are categorized into the two types of life—actual life and imaginative life. Factual truth, material beauty, prophetic vision, and curious vision are associated with actual life. Essential truth, aesthetic beauty, aesthetic vision, and creative vision are associated with imaginative life.
2. To distinguish material beauty from aesthetic beauty, two standards are taken into account—whether they are natural or artificial and whether they can provoke aesthetic emotions. Only those simultaneously artificial and able to provoke aesthetic emotions are called aesthetic beauty in the paper.
3. The paper uses Bell's formulation to define significant form and aesthetic emotion. According to him, "the essential quality in a work of art is significant form"; "significant form is the expression of a peculiar emotion felt for reality"; this emotion he calls aesthetic emotion, and the objects that provoke aesthetic emotion he considers works of art (Bell 100, 6-7).





FRAMEWORK B

1. There are four types of vision: prophetic vision, curious vision, aesthetic vision, and creative vision. There are two types of gazed objects: objects in the material world and works of art.

There are two types of participants: audiences and artists.

2. Prophetic vision is when audiences look at the material world for utilitarian purpose. When they contemplate objects in the material world disinterestedly without immediate concern over survival.

3. Aesthetic vision is when audiences look at works of art and perceive a harmony of lines and colors. It is only received by *audiences* who can and can only *perceive* combinations of lines and colors from *works of art*.

4. Creative vision is when artists perceive pure forms/essential truth definitely and clearly from any object and are able to express their feelings in and through a work of art. It is performed by *artists* who are able to perceive harmony of pure forms more definitely and clearly from even *mundane materials* and transform the perception into *artistic creation*.

5. When artists experience creative vision, they still need to solve artistic problems to transform their vision into design. Specific problems are subject to each artist, which may be to “express himself within a square or a circle or a cube, to balance certain harmonies ... or to conquer certain difficulties of medium” (Bell 66).

**CHAPTER TWO:  
THE AESTHETIC VISION OF MRS. RAMSAY**

**I**

The first part of *To the Lighthouse*, entitled “The Window,” is made up of nineteen sections and describes a single day of the Ramsay family and their friends before a planned expedition to the lighthouse on the following day. “The Window” closes with a large dinner party, hosted and managed by Mrs. Ramsay. She dominates “The Window” as Woolf uses her marriage with Mr. Ramsay, her care for her youngest son, James, and her interactions with friends, especially her influence on the painter Lily, to construct an intricate exploration on human relationships, an exploration that returns obsessively to ideas and notions about the “imaginative life,” “aesthetic” and “creative vision” and art itself. Woolf portrays Mrs. Ramsay as a figure who wanders between the boundaries of “actual life” and “imaginative life” and more linked with the latter. While the former refers to everyday life where humans are subject to the natural instincts, the latter to a certain extent frees humans from their evolutionary tendency. By doing so, Mrs. Ramsay comes to symbolize an aesthetic problem that represents larger questions about human existence which the rest of the book attempts to solve. This chapter analyzes the complex depictions of Mrs. Ramsay associated with “aesthetic vision” and what she symbolizes through charting and examining her three attempts at creation.

In the first part of the book, Mrs. Ramsay initiates her process of creation three times, each different from the previous one and each one framed by Fry and Bell’s work. The first time occurs when she reads a story to James, her youngest son. As her husband Mr. Ramsay passes by, she perceives their potential reconciliation and generates a transient harmony between them.

This harmony envelopes them and Woolf distinguishes it from mundane, everyday materials because of its musical nature. Mrs. Ramsay's effort is seen as artistic, but it is not a work of art since first, its content is based on a specific ideology about marriage and, second, rather than *producing* a concrete work of art, Mrs. Ramsay only *senses* that such a work is possible in her mind.

The second moment of creation occurs when she looks at the lighthouse alone and unconsciously murmurs sentences that she cannot recognize. Here, Woolf shows Mrs. Ramsay detaching herself from her duty as wife and mother in the "actual life" and, instead, wandering boundlessly in an imaginative world. Her sentences come in response to the lighthouse (the central symbol of the novel), and they respond to the lighthouse as if it is a "significant form." Once again, however, this moment of creation is not portrayed as a work of art because her murmurs are unconsciously made, and so they lack any aesthetic intention: they are not designed specifically for aesthetic enjoyment.

Her third and final moment of creation is the dinner party which merges her two previous experiences. She achieves harmony among all her family members and friends, and she has a profound experience that echoes Fry's notion of "aesthetic emotion." In fact, Woolf describes Mrs. Ramsay's gaze as she looks at the table in ways that are close to Fry's "creative vision." However, unlike Fry's creator, she does not fully understand her vision and what she creates remains inadequate for a work of art.

## II

Throughout "The Window," Mrs. Ramsay constantly attempts to build an imaginatively ideal place for James that differs from reality in the "actual life." The very first sentence sets the

tone of imagination for Mrs. Ramsay and her interactions with her son: “‘Yes, of course, if it’s fine tomorrow,’ said Mr. Ramsay. ‘But you’ll have to be up with the lark,’ she added”

(*Lighthouse* 7). Without any context, the two affirmative words “yes” and “of course” emphasize Mrs. Ramsay’s reassurance to her son and immediately reveal her effort to soothe and satisfy him. The following “if it’s fine tomorrow,” however, points out the illusory nature of her assurance since it builds on an unwarranted assumption. Yet her reliance on the assumption reflects reality’s lack of importance compared with imagination to her. The added claim, “you’ll have to be up with the lark,” strengthens the reliability of her imagination since the phrase, “have to,” implies necessity. “Lark,” refers both to the early morning bird and “a frolicsome adventure,” adding to the joyful and exciting characteristics of Mrs. Ramsay’s statement about the certainty of an imagined future, distinct from an uncertain reality (OED).

This imaginary assurance created by Mrs. Ramsay allows James to experience the enjoyment of being able to visit the lighthouse that is difficult for him to feel in the “actual life.” The second paragraph begins with a description of James’s feeling, that “to her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled, the expedition were bound to take place, and the wonder to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was, after a night’s darkness and a day’s sail, within touch” (*Lighthouse* 7). “Extraordinary joy” stresses the extremity of James’s happiness and sets the mood for the rest of the paragraph. His action, “looked forward,” also shows his eagerness for the trip, and “settled,” “expedition,” and “wonder,” with their implications of desire and satisfaction, reinforce James’ enjoyment at the prospect. Although this prospect seems unreal in the “actual life” since “for years and years” the wonder is never “within touch,” the expedition is now “settled” and “bound to take place,” which

asserts its inevitability. Mrs. Ramsay's imagination seems to make the impossible possible, even more real than the reality for James.

The presence of Mr. Ramsay, however, destroys this imaginative place through his stern insistence on reality. When James is immersed in his happiness at the imagined prospect of the expedition, Mr. Ramsay appears: "'But,' said his father, stopping in front of the drawing-room window, 'it won't be fine'" (*Lighthouse* 8). The father's "But" abruptly disturbs James's experience and his exclusive moment with his mother. The terse two-line paragraph in between the two long descriptions of James's thoughts suggests the suddenness of Mr. Ramsay's appearance, which seems like a violent intrusion. His short assertion, "it won't be fine," unlike the "if" statements used by Mrs. Ramsay and her son, presents a harsh reality. Instead of saying "the weather will be bad," Mr. Ramsay's use of "won't" directly negates Mrs. Ramsay's assurance and James's expectations, strengthening the contrast between the "actual life" and the "imaginative life," significantly represented by a father and a mother respectively.

This intrusion breaks the mother-son harmony between Mrs. Ramsay and James, stirring James's brutal anger towards his father: "Had there been an axe handy, or a poker, any weapon that would have gashed a hole in his father's breast and killed him, there and then, James would have seized it" (*Lighthouse* 8). The "extraordinary joy" brought by his mother vanishes and what replaces it is the "extremes of emotion" of wishing to kill his father, whether with an "axe" or a "poker" (*Lighthouse* 7, 8). The detailed description, "gashed a hole in his father's breast," emphasizes the extremity of his rage and Mr. Ramsay is viewed by James as an enemy body. The destruction of the "breast," a human organ of vital importance and "the seat of the affections and emotions," indicates James's emotional rage towards his father (OED).

James regards Mr. Ramsay's interruption as linked to his endless pursuit of truth, and he sees his father standing in front of the window, "not only with the pleasure of disillusioning his son and casting ridicule upon his wife, who was ten thousand times better in every way than he was (James thought), but also with some secret conceit at his own accuracy of judgement" (*Lighthouse* 8). As Mr. Ramsay attempts to break Mrs. Ramsay and James's imaginary prospect, what he employs is truth—"his own accuracy of judgement." Then Woolf links James's desire to kill Mr. Ramsay with an "axe" or "poker" by describing him as being "lean as a knife, narrow as the blade of one, grinning sarcastically" (*Lighthouse* 8). Here James views Mr. Ramsay as violently using his self as a weapon to attack his wife and son's creative illusion (*Lighthouse* 8). He also takes pleasure in demonstrating the power of his truth, through asserting his pursuit of empirical reality: "What he [Mr. Ramsay] said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact" (*Lighthouse* 8). Here, considering the rivalry between his truth and Mrs. Ramsay's imagination, Mr. Ramsay's truth at the moment exemplifies Fry's notion of "factual truth" in "actual life."

This invasion of the "imaginative life" by "factual truth" can also be seen through Charles Tansley, another male figure close to Mr. Ramsay: "'It's due west,' said the atheist Tansley, holding his bony fingers spread so that the wind blew through them, for he was sharing Mr. Ramsay's evening walk up and down, up and down the terrace. That is to say, the wind blew from the worst possible direction for landing at the lighthouse" (*Lighthouse* 9). Following Mr. Ramsay's assertive negation, Tansley states a fact that also harms the imagination. His action, "holding his bony fingers spread," indicates his scientific manner in assessing the wind. It seems that Tansley not only "share[s] Mr. Ramsay's evening walk" but also shares, whether sincerely or not, his firm passion for truth, which strikes James's vision once again with bare fact. Not

enough, Tansley takes one step further, directly announcing the outcome of the battle, “There’ll be no landing at the Lighthouse tomorrow” (*Lighthouse* 11). As before, he allies with Mr. Ramsay, “clapping his hands together as he stood at the window with her husband” (*Lighthouse* 11). The action “clap,” which makes a hard explosive noise and implies applauding, indicates the crude intrusion of “factual truth” and Tansley’s pleasure in it.

Mrs. Ramsay, however, refuses to accept what Fry would term “actual life” or its triumph over the “imaginative life,” and attempts to wave imagination into reality. After Mr. Ramsay’s assertion, Mrs. Ramsay responds disapprovingly again: “But it may be fine—I expect it will be fine ... making some little twist of the reddish-brown stocking she was knitting, impatiently” (*Lighthouse* 8). Like Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay starts her statement with the word “but” which directly counters her husband’s embrace of reality. In contrast, “I expect,” unlike Mr. Ramsay’s statement of fact, constructs the fine weather as subjective expectation, separate from objective truth. Yet instead of confronting the “actual life” by her imagination straightforwardly, Mrs. Ramsay chooses to utilize reality to consolidate her construction: as she refutes her husband, she continues knitting the stocking that is supposed to be “given to the Lighthouse keeper for his little boy” (*Lighthouse* 8). The stocking is only worthwhile if they can visit the lighthouse the following day. Despite her husband’s dismissal of the possibility, Mrs. Ramsay does not stop knitting, making something concrete in the “actual life” whose purpose is an imaginary prospect.

While Mr. Ramsay values “factual truth” and “actual life,” Mrs. Ramsay attempts to protect her son from them. To Mr. Ramsay, “all of his own children, who sprung from his loins, should be aware from childhood that life is difficult” (*Lighthouse* 8). The scientifically biological account of his children’s births indicates his view of life and his children’s future, which will be “difficult,” exemplified by the fact that “it won’t be fine” (*Lighthouse* 8). Mrs. Ramsay,



however, hopes to protect her son from this view of the world, at least in his childhood. Hearing Tansley reinforcing Mr. Ramsay that “it’s due west,” Mrs Ramsay thinks “Yes, he did say disagreeable things . . . it was odious of him to rub this in, and make James still more disappointed” (*Lighthouse* 9). She is dissatisfied not because the statement is inaccurate, but because it tampers with her imagination that gives her son “extraordinary joy” and makes him more disappointed (*Lighthouse* 7).

In contrast to Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Ramsay attempts to maintain in James what she sees as his purity and his imagination. When she ponders the future of her children, “These two she would have liked to keep for ever just as they were, demons of wickedness, angels of delight, never to see them grow up into long-legged monsters. Nothing made up for the loss” (*Lighthouse* 61). While adults are “long-legged monsters,” James and Cam are described as “wicked” and “delight[ful].” This contradiction suggests Mrs. Ramsay’s reluctance to limit the direction of her children’s growth. Despite the positive potential of growing up, Mrs. Ramsay fears that her children become mature “monsters,” losing the perception of pure and extreme emotions. For her, their current unconfined liberty is the most valuable quality, which is hard to preserve after childhood.

### III

This freedom is what allows the children to create their own imaginative worlds and what attracts Mrs. Ramsay. At night, Mrs. Ramsay “found them [the children] netted in their cots like birds among cherries and raspberries, still making up stories about some little bit of rubbish—something they had heard, something they had picked up in the garden. They had all their little treasures... Never will they be so happy again” (*Lighthouse* 62). From two insignificant events

“something they had heard” and “something they had picked up in the garden,” the children are able to make up stories. These sources are called “some little bit of rubbish” and Mrs. Ramsay contrasts their unpolluted interests with the mere concern over efficiency and usefulness in the adult world. Indeed, the productions of the rubbish, their stories, are “their little treasures.” The progressive tense of “still making” suggests the continuous nature of James’s and Cam’s storytelling, and simile of being like “birds among cherries and raspberries” links the children’s creative freedom with the natural and unpolluted world. “Netted in their cots,” they are protected from the outside world both by their young age and by their mother. Here the children’s vision is even similar (but still inferior) to what Fry terms “creative vision” since they are able to see some essential things in mundane materials and make them into stories. Mrs. Ramsay ends her thought, however, sorrowfully: “never will they be so happy again.” She appears convinced that as James and Cam grow up and confront the “actual life” where Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley live, they will lose this imaginative ability to create stories.

As Mrs. Ramsay treasures and protects in her children their imagination, she also creates herself an alternative reality which links her to art by Fry’s statement that works of art are the expression of “imaginative life” (20). Children, Fry states, “if left to themselves, never, I believe, copy what they see ... but express, with a delightful freedom and sincerity, the mental images which make up their own imaginative lives” (20). Mrs. Ramsay’s children, especially James and Cam, make up stories out of their imagination, which constitute works, if not of art itself, related to the notion of art. Mrs. Ramsay’s protection of their naiveté, therefore, can be seen as a preservation of the foundation for “imaginative life” and art or creativity. In addition, she creates an “imaginative life” for James and therefore directly associates herself with art.

When Mrs. Ramsay's reads the story "The Fisherman and His Wife" to her youngest son James, Woolf strengthens the intimate relationship between Mrs. Ramsay and artistry. The story and her reading of it are made analogous to works of art and provide an escape from unsatisfactory human relations as Mrs. Ramsay thinks after meeting Mr. Carmichael:

the pettiness of some part of her, and of human relations, how flawed they are, how despicable, how self-seeking, at their best . . . she had better devote her mind to the story of the Fisherman and his Wife and so pacify that bundle of sensitiveness (none of her children was as sensitive as he was), her son James. "The man's heart grew heavy," she read aloud, "and he would not go. He said to himself, 'It is not right,' and yet he went. And when he came to the sea the water was quite purple and dark blue, and grey and thick, and no longer green and yellow, but it was still quiet. And he stood there and said—" Mrs. Ramsay could have wished that her husband had not chosen that moment to stop. (*Lighthouse* 45)

In the story, the water turns from "green and yellow" to "purple and dark blue." The detailed descriptions of colors endow the text with the quality of graphic art and echo both Woolf's essay "Blue & Green" and her description of Cezanne's painting as "green and blue" (*Letters*, vol. 2, 15). Mrs. Ramsay is troubled by the "flawed" and "despicable" human relations around her in real life and turns to the story and her son for comfort. "Devote" implies an almost religious and "zealous" pursuit of the story that safeguards her from the complicated human interactions of adulthood (OED). She reads it "aloud," creating an imaginative world that is created by her, James, and the story. Mr. Ramsay, once again, intrudes into this moment and Mrs. Ramsay's dismay suggests her yearning for an "imaginative life" and art as an expression of the "imaginative life" that temporarily separates her from the inevitable reality of her husband and all that he represents in the "actual life."

Woolf emphasizes the artistic characteristics of the story itself and of Mrs. Ramsay's telling of it. For Mrs. Ramsay, "the story of the Fisherman and his Wife was like the bass gently accompanying a tune, which now and then ran up unexpectedly into the melody (*Lighthouse* 59).

Fry argues that art produces its sensations primarily through “order” and “variety” (29). Mrs. Ramsay’s telling of the story contains variety with its “unexpected” scenes and the “order” as “melody” suggests. “Into” connects the “unexpected” with the “melody” both in syntax and in meaning, creating variety and order simultaneously. Mrs. Ramsay and James are further linked by reading and listening to the story: “Mrs. Ramsay went on reading, relieved, for she and James shared the same tastes and were comfortable together” (*Lighthouse* 59). In Fry’s terms, they share a passion for “imaginative life” and the appreciation of art. At night James with Cam creates his own stories told to his mother, here his mother reads the story to him. A wall is built by the stories that encircles Mrs. Ramsay and her son detaching them from the outside world and allowing them to remain within the world of imagination. This is made explicit when she finishes because “Mrs. Ramsay did not let her voice change in the least as she finished the story, and added, shutting the book, and speaking the last words as if she had made them up herself” (*Lighthouse* 64). At the last moment, Mrs. Ramsay speaks the words “as if she had made them up herself,” as if what she utters is her own creation. Woolf describes this reading almost like a creative process in itself.

Mrs. Ramsay’s reading also manifests its creative nature through the descriptions of Mrs. Ramsay’s mental state, which is similar to Lily’s when she is painting. In his essay “The Artistic Problem,” Bell claims that creation is always pre-dated by a “creative impulse,” which promptly follows on the moment of “passionate apprehension” that fills the artists with “an intolerable desire to express” themselves (103). Similarly, when reading the story to James, Mrs. Ramsay has “only strength enough to move her finger, in exquisite abandonment to exhaustion, across the page of Grimm’s fairy story” (*Lighthouse* 42). Her emotion is so intense that she surrenders herself to the sensation of creation which completely consumes her energy. Tired yet ecstatic,

she devotes her body and mind to the “exquisite” impulse. Exhausted, she “[moves] her finger,” just as Lily does near the end of the book, after which Lily, too, is “completely tired out” from creation (*Lighthouse* 210). Lily’s later echo suggests that when Mrs. Ramsay moves her finger “across the page of Grimm’s fairy story,” she no longer merely reads the content but also paints her strokes on the paper. The page is now like Lily’s canvas on which Mrs. Ramsay draws her line.

Woolf’s language even makes explicit that Mrs. Ramsay is creating. As she moves her finger across the page, “there throbbed her, like a pulse in a spring which has expanded to its full width and now gently ceases to beat, the rapture of successful creation” (*Lighthouse* 42). The musical implications of the words “pulse” and “beat” once again link the experience to creating art. At this ecstatic moment, Mrs. Ramsay’s artistic life blooms to its fullest self, although it only lasts for an instant. She enters into the eroticized state “of “the rapture of successful creation.”

The source of Mrs. Ramsay’s creative impulse seems to be her “passionate apprehension” of the possible harmony between her and her husband and its final product is her realization of the harmony. Before Mrs. Ramsay’s “successful creation,” Mr. Ramsay comes near her (*Lighthouse* 42). Although the two are near each other several times before, the proximity between the couple at this moment is not merely physical but also mental. This time, “Filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied, he said, at last, looking at her with humble gratitude, restored, renewed, that he would take a turn; he would watch the children playing cricket. He went” (*Lighthouse* 42). Mr. Ramsay no longer equips himself with sharp weapons but “drops off satisfied” like a child. The reason for his softening is his wife, as he becomes softened when “filled with her words.” Walking past her, he seems to realize Mrs. Ramsay’s power and is “restored, renewed,” and his characteristic defects are temporarily repaired. “Looking at her with

humble gratitude,” Mr. Ramsay for a moment becomes a gentle husband and father who has the potential to live in harmony with his wife.

As Mrs. Ramsay senses “the rapture of successful creation,” Woolf continues the musical simile: “Every throb of this pulse seemed, as he walked away, to enclose her and her husband, and to give each that solace which two different notes, one high, one low, struck together, seem to give each other as they combine” (*Lighthouse* 42). The “pulse” is now connected to her husband’s movement and she and her husband are woven into a single piece of music, in which the usually discordant couple become harmonious, “struck together.” The two notes now “combine” with each other into a whole, which grants them “solace” and comfort. Later, the harmony is described as “the pure joy, of the two notes sounding together.”

At the moment when Mrs. Ramsay becomes conscious of their harmony, her perception is similar to what Fry names “aesthetic vision” in that she perceives a potential harmony in the content of their marriage. Woolf’s description of Mrs. Ramsay here also evokes the language of “creative vision” since it suggests that Mrs. Ramsay not only perceives harmony in their marriage, but is almost able to transform that perception into artistically creating that marriage. Just as Woolf portrays Mrs. Ramsay as someone in the boundary of “actual life” and “imaginative life,” so she positions her in between “aesthetic” and “creative vision.”

Unable to fully attain her “creative vision,” the musical ecstasy symbolizing their harmony is fragile and temporal:

Yet, as the resonance died, and she turned to the Fairy Tale again, Mrs. Ramsay felt not only exhausted in body (afterwards, not at the moment, she always felt this) but also there tinged her physical fatigue some faintly disagreeable sensation with another origin ... she realised, at the turn of the page when she stopped and head dully, ominously, a wave fall, how it came from this: she did not like, even for a second, to feel finer than her husband. (*Lighthouse* 42)

As they combine with each other into a single piece of music, almost immediately the harmony breaks. Earlier Mrs. Ramsay protects James' hopes from Mr. Ramsay and the parents stand as opposites, her for imaginative life, beauty, and maternal love, him for actual life, truth, and paternal care. Now, Mr. Ramsay decides to momentarily take off his pride and come close to his wife with "humble gratitude" (*Lighthouse* 42). The couples who are symbols for Victorian marriage achieve their harmony of marriage at the moment. However, after a transilient joy, Mrs. Ramsay rejects this harmony since it breaks her fragile fantasy about her husband as it means she feels finer than him.

Mrs. Ramsay's respect for Mr. Ramsay is partly built on her subjective belief that her husband is of "the highest importance" (*Lighthouse* 42). Although she claims not to doubt her husband's importance, her belief is easily disturbed by his actions and outside opinions: "it was their relation, and his coming to her like that, openly, so that any one could see, that discomposed her; for then people said he depended on her, when they must know that of the two he was infinitely the more important, and what she gave the world, in comparison with what he gave, negligible" (*Lighthouse* 42-43). She even imagines the detailed reactions of their friends-- "then people said he depended on her."

This belief in her husband's importance originates from her trust in his quest for truth. When she explains the importance of her husband's work, she repeatedly uses the word "truth" and its synonyms (*Lighthouse* 42, 43). Substantially valuing these truths, Mrs. Ramsay has difficulty reconciling the contradiction between her support of her husband's quest for them and her concealing of certain truths from him. All these worries and fears over the reduction of her husband's importance and therefore the invalidation of her respect for him "diminished the entire

joy, the pure joy, of the two notes sounding together, and let the sound die on her ear now with a dismal flatness” (*Lighthouse* 42).

Mrs. Ramsay, unfortunately, seems to confuse, in Fry and Bell’s terms, “factual truth” with “essential truth,” which prevents her from experiencing harmony with her husband in everyday life. When Lily asks Mr. Ramsay’s son Andrew what his father’s book is about, Andrew answers, “subject and object and the nature of reality,” and, uses as his example, “thinking of a kitchen table ... when you are not there” (*Lighthouse* 26). Lily then contemplates, “Naturally, if one’s day were passed in this seeing of angular essences, this reducing of lovely evenings, with all their flamingo clouds and blue and silver to a white deal four-legged table (and it was a mark of the finest minds to do so), naturally one could not be judged like an ordinary person” (*Lighthouse* 26). What Mr. Ramsay pursues through his work is not the “factual truth” of “actual life” but rather the “essential truth.” Although he seems unable to reach that truth, he still looks for it. Mrs. Ramsay, however, fails to recognize the difference. She attempts to value her husband’s academic achievements, yet for the majority of her time she can only notice his pursuit of “factual truth” in daily life, like when he ruthlessly breaks James’ unrealistic hope for visiting the lighthouse in the following day. Because of the misunderstanding, the harmony between Mrs. Ramsay and her husband inevitably collapses.

Mrs. Ramsay’s unfortunate failure to create a work of art is not because she lacks the *ability* to perceive “essential truth” or “aesthetic emotions” in mundane materials *by nature*. Rather, the root of her harmony in the “actual life” and the unstable foundation of the root prevent her creation from becoming a work of art. When the created harmony between her and her husband breaks down, Mrs. Ramsay thinks, “at the very moment when it was painful to be reminded of the inadequacy of human relationships, that the most perfect was flawed, and could



not bear the examination which, loving her husband, with her instinct for truth, she turned upon it” (*Lighthouse* 43). For her, “the most perfect” thing can only exist in marriage and in human relationships that cannot be separated from “actual life.” Revealingly “at this moment when she was fretted thus ignobly in the wake of her exaltation . . . Mr. Carmichael shuffled past, in his yellow slippers, and some demon in her made it necessary for her to call out, as he passed, ‘Going indoors, Mr. Carmichael?’” (*Lighthouse* 43). Even when she is exhausted after this transient moment of exaltation, her imaginative “demon” still seeks harmonic human relationships as she seeks to communicate with Mr. Carmichael.

When her endeavor to create harmony in the “actual life” breaks down, Mrs. Ramsay turns back to the story which ends with the line “And there they are living still at this very moment” (*Lighthouse* 64). The fisherman and his wife not only continue living in, but they also remain at the moment forever. Their entire life is “still[ed]” into a single “moment,” motionless and timeless. They move forward and stay simultaneously, never beginning nor ending. Woolf here plays with Fry’s idea that in art, “no need exists to make reference to what is outside the unity, and this becomes for the time being a universe” (21). This final line confines the characters within the story’s everlasting possibility. Mrs. Ramsay’s action of “shutting the book” as she narrates the end reinforces the notion of a self-contained universe.

#### IV

When Mrs. Ramsay finishes reading the story to James, she thinks, “it was so important what one said, and what one did, and it was a relief when they went to bed. 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” (*Lighthouse* 65).

Notwithstanding her love for her husband and children, she still feels tired when they are around because what she says and acts necessarily influences others. In this sense, her desire to create harmony of human relationships seems to be destructive of her own sense of self, and when she finally is freed from her duty as a wife, she confesses staying by herself is her real desire. There, “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” (*Lighthouse* 65). Her true self that always hides inside her other roles now reveals itself as an “invisible” darkness.

The discovery of the other self grants Mrs. Ramsay opportunities to fully explore and embrace a whole new world, a complete “imaginative life.” At the moment she continues to knit, but “it was thus that she felt herself; and this self having shed its attachment was free for the strangest adventure” (*Lighthouse* 65). All the activities she conducts before like reading the story and forming harmony still grow roots in the “actual life” and in accordance with her dutiful roles. Now she reaches a space of freedom: “When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seems limitless” and “her horizon seemed to her limitless” (*Lighthouse* 65). The horizon is *hers*. She chooses to open her eyes wide, and now she owns boundless space in front of her. She begins to wander around: “There were all the places she had not seen; the Indian plains; she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome. This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting” (*Lighthouse* 65). Whether the place is Indian plains or Rome does not matter, that “core of darkness,” the soul of her self, can go imaginatively to anywhere she wants.

With this new discovery, Woolf makes explicit Mrs. Ramsay’s link to art as she identifies herself with the two artists in the novel, the poet Mr. Carmichael and the painter Lily Briscoe:

“And to everyone there was always this sense of unlimited resources, she supposed; one after another, she, Lily, Augustus Carmichael, must feel, our apparitions, the things you know us by, are simply childish ... but now and again we rise to the surface and this is what you see us by” (*Lighthouse* 65). Now Mrs. Ramsay considers herself a member of this circle of artists: the apparitions are “our” apparitions; “we” experience the freedom together. The contrast between “you” and “us” reinforces the exclusiveness of the group. Her outer, social self as a wife and a mother is only the surface in the “actual life,” but deep down her inner self associated with art emerges: “there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity” (*Lighthouse* 66). Her statement echoes the language used by Fry and Bell to describe the creative process and prefigures Lily’s final vision when she completes her painting of Mrs. Ramsay. Now Mrs. Ramsay perceives “eternity” and transforms her vision into forms; it “comes together” into some “exclamation of triumph” *over* life.

Here Woolf suggests that Mrs. Ramsay creates something linked to artistic creation: “she looked out to meet the stroke of the Lighthouse, the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke ... and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke” (*Lighthouse* 66). The stroke not only means the lighthouse’s beam of light but also suggests the painterly stroke and the capitalized Lighthouse that symbolizes an imaginative land where the weather can turn good and where art is born. The stroke not only belongs to her, but it also becomes her, and she becomes the stroke: “she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—the light, for example” (*Lighthouse* 66). As they identify with each other, Mrs. Ramsay matures into a pseudo-artist: “And it would lift up on it some little phrase or other which had been lying in her mind like that—‘Children don’t forget, children don’t forget’—which she would repeat and begin adding to it, It will end, it will end,

she said. It will come, it will come, when suddenly she added, we are in the hands of the Lord” (*Lighthouse* 66). She begins her process of creation that is disengaged from her “actual life,” and the end of her concern as a mother is followed by the arrival of this spiritual experience.

## V

The dinner party on the same night is Mrs. Ramsay’s final creation, which roots in the intersection of “actual life” and “imaginative life” with more association to the latter. At the beginning of the dinner, Mrs. Ramsay is distracted by the discord of human relationships again, but she begins to solve the discord when she looks at them as forms: “Raising her eyebrows at the discrepancy—that was what she was thinking, that was what she was doing—ladling out soup—she felt, more and more strongly, outside that eddy; or as if a shade had fallen, and, robbed of colour, she saw things truly” (*Lighthouse* 86). She looks at what lies beyond the “eddy.” The environments around her become abstract “shade” and “colour,” and she is able to look through the abstraction to perceive the truth, the essence—discrepancy. She thinks, “There was no beauty anywhere. She forebore to look at Mr. Tansley. Nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate” (*Lighthouse* 86). Everyone sits “separate” from each other, unable to be connected. Later, Mrs. Ramsay points out her worry more directly: “Human relations were all like that, she thought, and the worst . . . were between men and women” (*Lighthouse* 95).

Mrs. Ramsay attempts to mend this discrepancy by connecting her family and friends by arranging them and their conversation aesthetically like objects on the table. Seeing the separation of the guests, she realizes that “the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her,” and she feels the “old familiar pulse . . . beating,” echoing the pulse when she read the story to James (*Lighthouse* 86). She nurses the pulse, “listening to it,

sheltering and fostering the still feeble pulse as one might guard a weak flame with a newspaper” (*Lighthouse* 86). Woolf’s language emphasizes the creative nature of this pulse and refers to it as Mrs. Ramsay’s vision, akin to significant form. Slowly Mrs. Ramsay starts her work of human connection: she talks with Mr. Bankes about their common friends, the Mannings; she comments on the prospective marriage between Paul and Minta; she even wants to match Lily with Mr. Bankes. Her dissonant relationship with Mr. Bankes at the beginning is also repaired. When Mr. Bankes eats Mrs. Ramsay’s specialty beef stew, “all his love, all his reverence, had returned; and she knew it” (*Lighthouse* 102). Their friendship is restored, and Mrs. Ramsay has created a harmonious form from human relationships.

Woolf emphasizes that aesthetic perceptions and artistic forms are involved in Mrs. Ramsay’s creative process as she looks at the table:

Now eight candles were stood down the table and after the first stoop the flames stood upright and drew with them into visibility the long table entire, and in the middle a yellow and purple dish of fruit. What had she done with it, Mrs. Ramsay wondered, for Rose’s arrangements of the grapes and pears, of the horny pink-lined shell, of the bananas, made her think of a trophy fetched from the bottom of the sea, of Neptune’s banquet, of the bunch that hangs with vine leaves over the shoulder of Bacchus (in some picture), among the leopard skins and the torches lolloping red and gold ... Thus brought up suddenly into the light it seemed possessed of great size and depth, was like a world in which one could take one’s staff and climb hills, she thought, and go down into valley, and to her pleasure (for it brought them into sympathy momentarily) she saw that Augustus too feasted his eyes on the same plate of fruit, plunged in, broke off a bloom there, a tassel here, and returned, after feasting, to his hive. That was his way of looking, different from hers. But looking together united them. (*Lighthouse* 99)

In the scene, Mrs. Ramsay’s attention turns from the practical use of tableware and fruits to their forms. Physical shapes, colors, and positions of the objects are extensively discussed while their functions of holding food or being eaten are barely mentioned. In her eyes, the table now becomes a garden full of hills and valleys where she can climb and wander. It is related to the gods, Bacchus and Neptune, whom significantly Lily also perceives at the end of the novel just

before she completes her painting. Now Mrs. Ramsay sees in front of her eyes not a dinner table but a sophisticated, arranged landscape and by looking at the table aesthetically she and Augustus are united.

Woolf makes clear that the dinner party is Mrs. Ramsay's approximate work of art and she creates concordant human relationships and perceives a sense of serenity and harmony. Sitting and looking at the table, "two emotions were called up in her, one profound—for what could be more serious than the love of man for woman, what more commanding, more impressive, bearing it in its bosom the seeds of death; at the same time these lovers, these people entering into illusion glittering eyed, must be danced round with mockery, decorated with garlands" (*Lighthouse* 102). Through her effort, two kinds of emotions are created and felt here. One is harmonious human relationships; the other is more profound than that. Although she cannot name it, she understands its significance and its intense impression, which looks similar to what Bell calls "aesthetic emotion." It seems that Mrs. Ramsay has her approximate work of art at the moment. Enjoying herself in the profound emotion, "It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity ... there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out ... in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby ... Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures" (*Lighthouse* 107). Just like a work of art, Mrs. Ramsay's creation ignores trivial and mundane concerns and exists for eternity.

## VI

Wandering at the boundaries of "actual life" and "imaginative life," Mrs. Ramsay seems to be condensed and overdetermined as a person. In the "actual life," she is a wife, a mother, and

the hostess of the household. But she also lives an “imaginative life,” where she reads stories to James, unconsciously murmurs sentences, and holds the dinner party. For her, the two kinds of life are intersected with each other to such a great extent that she cannot clearly distinguish them.

As an intricate character, Mrs. Ramsay is crucial to the development of the plots and the presentation of other characters, especially Lily Briscoe. It is Mrs. Ramsay who connects the characters with each other and moves the plot forward in the first part. To Lily, Mrs. Ramsay is perhaps the most critical figure for her painting. In her eyes, Mrs. Ramsay is the material world through which she can appreciate “significant form,” is herself a significant form and is even a work of art. Her profound emotion towards Mrs. Ramsay accompanies her entire journey to the completing of her painting, which both features and is a tribute to Mrs. Ramsay. Considering their intimate relationships, their connections to art, and their dominance in the first chapter and the last chapter respectively, it seems that Mrs. Ramsay poses Lily’s aesthetic problem—what is art—at the beginning, which is also Woolf’s problem. Although Fry and Bell both explore the notion extensively and their theories are used as frameworks for the paper, Woolf seems to develop her own ideas in the book, implied by the complex image of Mrs. Ramsay. To the end, Woolf uses Lily and the rest of the book to look for a solution, examined in the next chapter.

**CHAPTER THREE:**  
**THE CREATIVE VISION OF LILY BRISCOE**

**I**

Lily Briscoe is the other main female character in the book, who starts to paint a scene of Mrs. Ramsay reading to James in the first part and completes the work at the end. As a young female painter, sexually and emotionally attracted to Mrs. Ramsay, Lily seems to embody Woolf's exploration and understanding of art, possessing similar experiences and characteristics as both Vanessa Bell and Woolf herself. In a sense, Lily's process of painting is parallel to Woolf's process of writing. In this chapter, by examining the progress of Lily's thought and painting, I show how Woolf revises Fry and Bell by considering the role of gender and its effect on their ideas of "essential truth" and "creative vision." I contend that Woolf provides content to their formal concepts and, in the end, argues that at least a part of the purpose of art is for mourning and memory.

Significantly, Lily's painting excludes Mr. Ramsay resulting in a clear separation between male and female, representing "actual life" and "imaginative life" respectively. When Mrs. Ramsay tells James to stay positive about sailing to the lighthouse, she remembers she is sitting for Lily's painting: "the sight of the girl standing on the edge of the lawn painting reminded her; she was supposed to be keeping her head as much in the same position as possible for Lily's picture" (*Lighthouse* 20-21). Later when asked about the content of her painting, Lily answers, "it was Mrs. Ramsay reading to James" (*Lighthouse* 55). Woolf portrays the reading of the fisherman story earlier as an embodiment of the "imaginative life" and a challenge to Mr. Ramsay's insistence on "factual truth" in the "actual world." Lily's painting portrays this



symbolic action, not only reinforcing its link to the notion of “imaginative life,” but also suggesting that it is linked to women. By excluding Mr. Ramsay, Lily makes a conscious artistic decision and prefigures Woolf’s observation in *A Room of One’s Own* that “They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen’s day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex” (*Room* 81). Similar statements can be applied to Mrs. Ramsay, who is neither able nor willing to be separated from her husband and her children even at the climax of her dinner party. By leaving out the father figure in her painting, however, Lily deliberately breaks the patrilineal structure of the family—a father, a mother, and children. As a result, Mrs. Ramsay is symbolically liberated from her role as wife and represented as a mother reproducing knowledge to her son—a matrilineal structure.

Also significantly, Lily’s progress is constantly hampered by the existence of male figures. Initially, as Lily sits in front of her canvas, Mr. Ramsay interrupts her: “Indeed, he almost knocked her easel over, coming down upon her with his hands waving shouting out, ‘Boldly we rode and well,’ but, mercifully, he turned sharp, and rode off, to die gloriously she supposed upon the heights of Balaclava” (*Lighthouse* 21). Here Mr. Ramsay is described as violent and dominant, approaching Lily with his warrior song to block her path towards successful artistic creation. The aggressive male gaze takes away her talent and even threatens her safety, “And that was what Lily Briscoe could not have endured” (*Lighthouse* 21). Always, “she kept a feeler on her surroundings lest some one should creep up, and suddenly she should find her picture looked at” (*Lighthouse* 21). She not only keeps a “feeler” on those male stares but also is “readily affected” by what she feels—the malice of the men, especially by the destruction brought by Mr. Ramsay: “with Mr. Ramsay bearing down on her, she could do

nothing. Every time he approached—he was walking up and down the terrace—ruin approached, chaos approached. She could not paint” (OED; *Lighthouse* 152). Unlike Mrs. Ramsay who inspires her to paint, Lily cannot paint in the presence of Mr. Ramsay who prevents her from displaying her potential as an artist.

This male intrusion distorts and even blinds her sight. Powered by Mrs. Ramsay, Lily decides to “Let him gaze; she would steal a look at her picture” (*Lighthouse* 51). However, a sense of contradiction is apparent in the statement. On the one hand, Lily seems determined to ignore the male gaze and concentrate on her own work. On the other hand, the word “steal,” which usually describes the action of taking things away dishonestly by a thief, puts Lily at a vulnerable position. “He” pillages the painting. Lily has to “steal” a look at the picture which supposedly belongs to her. Worse, she remembers “Mr. Tansley whispering in her ear, ‘Women can’t paint, women can’t write ...’,” whose gendered verdict constantly echoes around her (*Lighthouse* 51). Torn apart, Lily desperately criticizes her own work: “Of all that only a few random marks scrawled upon the canvas remained. And it would never be seen; never be hung even,” and she begins to doubt her vision: “Such she often felt herself—struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: ‘But this is what I see; this is what I see,’ and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her” (*Lighthouse* 51, 23). “Creative vision” is what separates artists from audiences, but here Lily loses confidence about her vision and has to repeat “this is what I see” to maintain her courage. Later, Mr. Ramsay’s male gaze even ruthlessly deprives Lily of her talent and agency: “Let him [Mr. Ramsay] be fifty feet away, let him not even speak to you, let him not even see you, he permeated, he prevailed, he imposed himself. He changed everything.

She could not see the color; she could not see the lines” (*Lighthouse* 153). The mere thinking of Mr. Ramsay blinds Lily.

Although both are hampered by male aggression, Mrs. Ramsay remains in her marriage as a wife and mother, whereas Lily refuses to marry, something Woolf suggests enables her to be an artist. When Mrs. Ramsay is still alive, she asserts the value of marriage and tries to match-make for Lily: “there could be no disputing this: an unmarried woman (she lightly took her hand for a moment), an unmarried woman has missed the best of life” (*Lighthouse* 53). She even determinedly tries to choose a partner for Lily: “William *must* marry Lily. They have so many things in common. Lily is so fond of flowers. They are both cold and aloof and rather self-sufficing. She must arrange for them to take a long walk together” (*Lighthouse* 106; emphasis added). Here Mrs. Ramsay sees Lily’s self-sufficient and individual characteristics, yet rather than appreciating it as ends in itself or as key to artistic creation, she regards it as the reason for Lily to be married to William. Unyielding, “gathering a desperate courage she [Lily] would urge her own exemption from the universal law; plead for it; she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for that; and so, have to meet a serious stare from eyes of unparalleled depth, and confront Mrs. Ramsay’s simple certainty (and she was childlike now) that her dear Lily, her little Brisk, was a fool” (*Lighthouse* 53). Despite Lily’s love and passion for Mrs. Ramsay, she refuses her design and refuses to marry. She confronts Mrs. Ramsay’s vision because she knows that patriarchal marriage will blind her vision and destroy the possibility of her identity as a painter.

Lily also refuses to give what Mr. Ramsay constantly demands of women which Mrs. Ramsay gives him—sympathy. As shown above, Mrs. Ramsay nearly achieves “creative vision” in her first attempt but is prevented from reaching it because she still tries to express it in her

marriage. Lily clearly recognizes this fact, as she complains “he [Mr. Ramsay] wears Mrs. Ramsay to death” (*Lighthouse* 28). In the final part of *To the Lighthouse*, called simply “The Lighthouse,” Lily returns to the Ramsay’s house ten years later, during which time the First World War has occurred, and Mrs. Ramsay has died. Significantly, Mr. Ramsay now turns to Lily to demand sympathy from her in the way he used to demand it from his now dead wife: “this was one of those moments when an enormous need urged him, without being conscious what it was, to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy” (*Lighthouse* 154). Here Mr. Ramsay demands sympathy from Lily because of her gender and the threat to her identity is now even stronger: “You shan’t touch your canvas, he seemed to say, bearing down on her, till you’ve given me what I want of you” (*Lighthouse* 154). Symbolically, she is presented with two choices: repeat Mrs. Ramsay or represent Mrs. Ramsay--conform to society’s gender roles or resist them by becoming an artist. Lily remains silent to Mr. Ramsay’s demand ten years later and while he completes the promised journey to the lighthouse for Mrs. Ramsay, she completes the promised painting for (and of) Mrs. Ramsay.

## II

Unlike the men whom Lily attempts to avoid, Lily is attracted to Mrs. Ramsay as a mother, as a lover, and as a figure of the “imaginative life.” When Lily is in despair about being able to be an artist, confronted by her socio-economic position as an unmarried daughter within a lower-middle class family, she turns to Mrs. Ramsay: she “had much ado to control her impulse to fling herself (thank Heaven she had always resisted so far) at Mrs. Ramsay’s knee and say to her—but what could one say to her? ‘I’m in love with you?’ No, that was not true. ‘I’m in love

with this all,' waving her hand at the edge, at the house, at the children." (*Lighthouse* 23). When Lily is threatened by Mr. Ramsay, Mr. Tansley, and the world of men, she rushes towards Mrs. Ramsay. At this most vulnerable moment, she connects herself to Mrs. Ramsay, wanting to throw herself at the beautiful woman and say: "I'm in love with you." Throughout the book, Woolf consistently suggests Lily's hidden love for Mrs. Ramsay: As a daughter, she desires Mrs. Ramsay's comfort and protection; as a pursuer, she longs for her beauty and love; and as a painter, she craves for the inspiration brought by her muse.

Through her painting, Lily constantly strives to separate Mrs. Ramsay and herself from the traditional gender roles as wives, mothers, or daughters within families. But here, she embraces these identities and even appreciates their authority. The roles themselves are not what Lily fears. It is the mocking and violent gaze upon her by the men associated with these notions that she resists, which Mrs. Ramsay never forces on her but protects her from. As Lily continues to think, "Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tables, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee" (*Lighthouse* 54). Like Mrs. Ramsay, Lily demands harmony in human relationships as well, but this harmony must exclude the unequal relations between men and women.

This love is not confined to a mere emotion between Mrs. Ramsay and Lily. Woolf describes it as a much wider and deeper love that becomes her knowledge, grants Lily her "creative vision," and provides her with the inspiration for her work of art and solution to her "artistic problem." Talking with Mr. Bankes in front of her easel, "For him to gaze as Lily saw him gazing at Mrs. Ramsay was a rapture, equivalent, Lily felt, to the loves of dozens of young

men (and perhaps Mrs. Ramsay had never excited the loves of dozens of young men.) It was love, she thought, pretending to move her canvas, distilled and filtered” (*Lighthouse* 50). The word “rapture” is crucial here. It is used multiple times throughout the book, often associated with the process of artistic creation: when Mrs. Ramsay reads the story “The Fisherman and His Wife” to James, she feels the “rapture of successful creation” (*Lighthouse* 42). This love towards Mrs. Ramsay visible in Mr. Bankes’s gaze “distilled” and “filtered” Lily so that when Lily stares at Mrs. Ramsay and feels the world’s love for her, she is endowed with the ability to seize the “essential truth” out of love.

The love is not only Lily’s love for Mrs. Ramsay now but also men’s undemanding admiration for women that symbolically liberates Mrs. Ramsay and Lily from gendered expectations: it was “love that never attempted to clutch its object; but, like the love which mathematicians bear their symbols, or poets their phrases, was meant to be spread over the world and become part of the human gain. So it was indeed” (*Lighthouse* 50-51). Lily believes “The world by all means should have shared it, could Mr. Bankes have said why that woman pleased him so; why the sight of her reading a fairy tale to her boy had upon him precisely the same effect as the solution of a scientific problem” (*Lighthouse* 51). Mr. Bankes finds his solution gazing at Mrs. Ramsay reading to James; similarly, Lily approaches her solution to her “artistic problem” as well. In a sense, when Lily looks at Mrs. Ramsay with love, she has her “creative vision,” and when she feels the world’s love for Mrs. Ramsay, she partly sees her path towards solutions to her “artistic problem” that allows her to transform her vision to a work of art.

### III

Notwithstanding Woolf's condemnation of the unfair environments faced by women that hamper their artistic creation, she is not entirely partial about the gender issue. Her dissatisfaction with gendered ideology does not interfere with her appreciation of both genders in an aesthetic way. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf states, "It is fatal for any one who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly ... Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the act of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated" (102-103). Here the "marriage" refers to the mental union of men and women in a single person when she or he creates works of art.

This androgynous tendency is showed in the close relationship between Lily and Mr. Bankes. As examined above, Lily gains protection against the other gender through the widespread love for Mrs. Ramsay, which not only belongs to her but also belongs to men like Mr. Bankes: "Looking alone the level of Mr. Bankes's glance at her, she thought that no woman could worship another woman in the way he worshipped; they could only seek shelter under the shade which Mr. Bankes extended over them both" (*Lighthouse* 52). Here Mr. Bankes's worship towards the glorified woman protects Lily from male violence as well. When Lily sits to paint, she "was aware of some one coming out of the house, coming towards her; but somehow divined, from the footfall, William Bankes, so that though her brush quivered, she did not, as she would have done had it been Mr. Tansley, Paul Rayley, Minta Doyle, or practically anybody else, turn her canvas upon the grass, but let it stand" (*Lighthouse* 21). From the beginning, for Lily, Mr. Bankes is different from other men. Lily can stand his gaze, partly because of his

admiration for Mrs. Ramsay, which raises the possibility of unity between men and women that is free of gendered or ideological constraints.

Mr. Bankes also tries to understand Lily's painting from a scientific perspective, which simultaneously asserts the value of "essence," or "essential truth," in works of art. Looking at Lily's unfinished painting, "What did she wish to indicate by the triangular purple shape, 'just there'? he [Mr. Bankes] asked" (*Lighthouse* 55). Confronting the abstract that he is unfamiliar with, Mr. Bankes does not mock it but wants to learn about it. Lily replies, "It was Mrs. Ramsay reading to James, she said. She knew his objection—that no one could tell it for a human shape. But she had made no attempt at likeness, she said" (*Lighthouse* 55). This statement from Lily directly corresponds to Fry and Bell's emphasis on "essence" and "significant form." Here, Lily is able to have her "creative vision," see Mrs. Ramsay reading to James as "essence," inspired by the widespread love for Mrs. Ramsay, and intentionally paints the sight as a "triangular purple shape," whose design is her solution to her specific "artistic problems" Hearing her explanation, we are told, "Mr. Bankes was interested. Mother and child then—objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty—might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence" (*Lighthouse* 55-56). He listens patiently to Lily's explanation and examines it from his perspective, treating it equally and respectfully.

However, Lily refutes Mr. Bankes's understanding of her work: "But the picture was not of them, she said. Or, not in his sense. There were other senses too in which one might reverence them" (*Lighthouse* 56). The object is indeed Mrs. Ramsay and James, but Lily neither admires Mrs. Ramsay for her role as a mother nor intends to mimetically represent the scene. Instead, she seems to venerate Mrs. Ramsay for her maternal authority and protection; meanwhile, she loves her as an individual. She paints the picture as a "tribute," and what she intends to paint is her



vision of the scene instead of the scene as such (*Lighthouse* 56). Mr. Bankes, not angry at the refutation, “took it scientifically in complete good faith” (*Lighthouse* 56). He tries to understand Lily’s artistic thoughts from a scientific perspective without hostility or opposition.

This parallel between art and science echoes both Fry and Bell. In *Vision and Design*, Fry observes, “It is in its aesthetic value that the justification of the scientific theory is to be found, and with it the justification of the scientific method (qtd. in Fry 52). Fry asserts, “both of these aspects [in science]—the particularising and generalising—have their counterparts in art,” and he goes on to say, “Perhaps, the highest pleasure in art is identical with the highest pleasure in scientific theory. The emotion which accompanies the clear recognition of unity in a complex seems to be so similar in art and in science that it is difficult not to suppose that they are psychologically the same. It is, as it were, the final stage of both processes” (Fry 53, 54-55). Mr. Bankes’s connecting science and art indicates his capability and willingness to understand Lily’s work and even provides Lily with hints about what she intends to complete in her work—unity. Like Mr. Bankes cleverly points out, “The question [is] one of the relations of masses, of lights and shadows” (*Lighthouse* 56). While Mrs. Ramsay seeks unity of human relations in marriage, it is the aesthetic unity of pure forms that Lily attempts to work out through her “triangular purple shape,” which Mr. Bankes finds out and accepts (*Lighthouse* 55).

Then Lily shows her appreciation for Mr. Bankes’s personality: “up rose in a fume the essence of his being ... I respect you [Mr. Bankes] (she addressed silently him in person) in every atom; you are not vain; you are entirely impersonal ... you are the finest human being that I know ... you live for science” (*Lighthouse* 27-28). Again, the words “essence” and “impersonal” remind us of the notion of “essential truth” in artistic creation and in science. While art is usually considered emotional and science “impersonal,” they share here the

emphasis on “essential truth” and the quest for unity. Ten years later, Lily concludes, “Thanks to his scientific mind he understood—a proof of disinterested intelligence which had pleased her and comforted her enormously. One could talk of painting then seriously to a man. Indeed, his friendship had been one of the pleasure of her life. She loved William Bankes” (*Lighthouse* 179-180). This “disinterested intelligence” is what distinguishes Mr. Bankes from others and what partly allows Lily to have her “creative vision” and to make her vision into a work of art eventually. In this sense, while Woolf deems Lily’s refusal to marriage which symbolizes her resistance against gendered notions of women as what distinguishes Lily from Mrs. Ramsay and what allows Lily to have her “creative vision,” she also asserts the value of androgynous characteristics in artistic creation that requires a harmony of male and female minds.

#### IV

Through the character of Lily and her completion of the painting featuring Mrs. Ramsay at the end of the book, Woolf not only brings in content about gender to Fry and Bell’s formal aesthetics but also discusses the purpose of art as a process of mourning through memory. In the fourteenth volume of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* published by the Hogarth Press, there is an essay entitled “Mourning and Melancholia.” In the essay, Freud regards melancholia as pathological while seeing mourning as normal and even beneficial to the mourners’ mental health. Like melancholia, Freud claims, “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (243). However, mourning does not involve “the disturbance of self-regard” (Freud 244). Instead, it first operates reality tests, detaches the mourners from the lost objects bit by bit, and eventually frees them

from the sorrow: “Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition ... This opposition is so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis” (Freud 244). Mourning detaches the mourners from the lost objects gradually: “Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless, its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy ... Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and detachment of the libido is accompanied in respect of it” (Freud 244-245). Eventually, “when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (Freud 245).

Based on Freud’s definition of mourning, what Lily experiences after Mrs. Ramsay’s death in the third part of “The Lighthouse” seems to be a process of mourning. Returning to the Isle of Skye ten years later, Lily, “at forty-four, wasting her time, unable to do a thing, standing there, playing at painting, playing at the one thing one did not play at, and it was all Mrs. Ramsay’s fault. She was dead. The step where she used to sit was empty. She was dead” (*Lighthouse* 153). For ten years, although Lily *knows* the death of Mrs. Ramsay, she is unable to *accept* the fact or withdraw her attachment to Mrs. Ramsay and blames Mrs. Ramsay for her failure to do anything. Then, detailed memories of Mrs. Ramsay constantly emerge as a process of detaching her desire for the woman: “When she thought of herself and Charles throwing ducks and drakes and of the whole scene on the beach, it seemed to depend somehow upon Mrs. Ramsay sitting under the rock, with a pad on her knee, writing letters. (She wrote innumerable letters, and sometimes the wind took them and she and Charles just saved a page from the sea)”

(*Lighthouse* 164). “Hallucinatory wishful psychosis” and “cachectic energy” are visible in Lily as well: sitting around the familiar house where Mrs. Ramsay used to be, Lily wishes, “if they shouted loud enough Mrs. Ramsay would return. ‘Mrs. Ramsay!’” she said aloud, “Mrs. Ramsay!’ The tears ran down her face” ((Freud 244; *Lighthouse* 183). Eventually, luckily, Lily is able to accept the death of Mrs. Ramsay. As she sits in front of her canvas in the last words of the novel: “She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there in the center” (*Lighthouse* 211). For the first time, Lily clearly sees the emptiness at the steps brought by the absence of Mrs. Ramsay and draws the last stroke on her canvas. “I have had my vision,” Lily thinks, and Woolf writes. Through the process of painting and writing, which are also the process of mourning, they are finally freed from the hunt of the past by the death of Mrs. Ramsay and Julia Stephen.

## V

Lily’s and Woolf’s mourning through transforming the fragmented and sorrowful past into creative memory is best manifested in this final scene. Mr. Ramsay’s arrival at the lighthouse, echoing and fulfilling the unfulfilled desire to reach the lighthouse ten years earlier and responding to the death of Mrs. Ramsay during the previous period, leads to Lily’s eventual completion of the painting. These two processes perform a symbolic compensation for the loss of Mrs. Ramsay. Lily’s painting and Woolf’s writing of the painting are elegiac, mourning for the loss by working through it to provide a symbolic replacement which allegorically ends the meaningless chaos and harm of the past with significance and acceptance.

The lighthouse, the object of desire for James Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay in the first part remains unreachable for ten years and with the death of Mrs. Ramsay this journey becomes linked with her loss. It is clear that Mr. Ramsay, James, and Cam travel to the lighthouse in this final section as an attempt to recover Mrs. Ramsay: the journey now symbolizes their attempt to reach and remember her. Similarly, Lily's painting of Mrs. Ramsay reading to James (perhaps reading "The Fisherman and His Wife") has now become an attempt to remember and recreate Mrs. Ramsay as she is in "The Window."

Throughout this final part the journey is seen through Lily's vision of the journey which becomes inextricably linked to her painting: "'He must have reached it,' said Lily Briscoe aloud, feeling suddenly completely tired out. For the Lighthouse had become almost invisible, had melted away into a blue haze, and the effort of looking at it and the effort of thinking of him landing there, which both seemed to be one and the same effort, had stretched her body and mind to the utmost. Ah, but she was relieved" (*Lighthouse* 210). Woolf describes this moment as leading to a release from Lily's lasting obsession with the lighthouse and Mrs. Ramsay. The claim that "he must have reached it" and "he has landed" is said "aloud" by Lily, whose emotional cry rushes out of her "body and mind." As she "stretched her body and mind to the utmost, she feels suddenly and completely tired out and her energy is extinguished, echoing Mrs. Ramsay's earlier moment of creation. Accordingly, Woolf writes that "the lighthouse had become almost invisible, had melted away into a blue haze" and Lily can no longer see the lighthouse as it vanishes into a thick mist, into her sad "blue" past.

Lily's vision of the arrival not only releases her from her obsession but also returns completeness to her. The fragmentary time of the past is finished, and the time as a whole gains its full course again. "Relieved," Lily is free from her obligation to the past and "eased from

sorrow” (*Lighthouse* 210; OED). When claiming for the second and last time that “he has landed,” Lily, or Woolf, makes it explicit: “it is finished” (*Lighthouse* 211). Lily resolves the turbulent past with the finish of the journey to the capitalized Lighthouse.

The completed past, then, is processed into creative memory through Mr. Carmichael, depicted as “an old pagan god” (*Lighthouse* 210). Awakening from his nap, “surging up, puffing slightly, old Mr. Carmichael stood beside her, looking like an old pagan god, shaggy, with weeds in his hair and the trident (it was only a French novel) in his hand” (*Lighthouse* 211). The implication of water in the word “surge,” his similarity to a “pagan god,” his “shaggy” characteristics, and especially the description of the novel in his hand as “the trident,” the traditionally depicted feature of Poseidon, all parallel Mr. Carmichael to the Greek god. As Poseidon is the god of the sea, Mr. Carmichael becomes connected to the imagined and actual journey to the lighthouse: “Surging up,” Mr. Carmichael rises from the underground and brings his self into the air from the historical time. As a synthesis of the archaic and the present time, Mr. Carmichael is everything but the destroyed and absent past: “He there as if he were spreading his hands over all the weakness and suffering of mankind; she thought he was surveying, tolerantly and compassionately, their final destiny” (*Lighthouse* 211). As Lily stands near Mr. Carmichael, she thinks, “They had not needed to speak. They had been thinking the same things and he had answered her without her asking him anything” (*Lighthouse* 211). Lily identifies with him.

As Mr. Carmichael surveys their shared final destiny, “Now he has crowned the occasion, she thought, when his hand slowly fell, as if she had seen him let fall from his great height a wreath of violets and asphodels which, fluttering slowly, lay at length upon the earth” (*Lighthouse* 211). The wreaths of “violets” and “asphodels” combine the flowers of Aphrodite

and Persephone, the flowers of sexuality and of mourning. Intentionally letting the flowers fall, Lily allows the wreath of violets and asphodels to “lay at length upon the earth” to crown the occasion. After a long time of struggle, she mercifully allows herself to lie upon the earth, where the flower grows and where she is born, to take a rest from the haunting past. Instantly she feels “as if she were recalled by something over there” (*Lighthouse* 211). The meaninglessness of the past time has become a meaningful memory, and the scattered past is regathered into organized and creative memory.

This moment enables Lily to identify and face the incompleteness of her painting, and the memory becomes the last stroke on her canvas. Feeling that “she was recalled by something over there, she turned to her canvas. There it was—her picture” (*Lighthouse* 211). The repetition of the word “there” and the syntactic symmetry between the first “there” and “her canvas” seem to reveal the correspondence between the memory and her painting. Not only impelling her to look at the picture but the memory also constitutes it. Her painting is “there,” where the memory is, “with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something” (*Lighthouse* 211).

The haunting image of Mrs. Ramsay, now transformed into meaningful memory, fills the incomplete painting. She “looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred” (*Lighthouse* 211). “Empty” is usually used to describe space, and the pronoun “they” seems to refer to “the steps” here. Mrs. Ramsay and James, who originally occupy the space and can be represented as “they” as well, are substituted by “the steps” syntactically, which thoroughly erases their existence in the past. And her canvas “was blurred.” Meanwhile, “with a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there in the centre” (*Lighthouse* 211). The word “with” at the beginning of the sentence implies the tight connection

between the emptiness in the steps and canvas and the sight that she sees clear for a second. At that moment, the phantom and obsession of Mrs. Ramsay disappear into memory; Lily is eventually allowed to see the world as what it is without the frustrating time in the past.

The decisive line drawn in the center of the canvas, therefore, not only completes the painting formally but also marks the mourning for the absence of Mrs. Ramsay with her symbolic return in the painting through memory, which grants Lily the final acceptance of the past. Formally and aesthetically, the central line on the canvas, like the symbolized lighthouse and the second part “Time Passes” in the book, achieves what Fry terms “collective unity”—the unity attained when the attractions of the audiences are balanced around the central line of a picture (31). Substantially, it marks the end of the process of Lily’s and Woolf’s mourning. As Lily asks herself, “it would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter” (*Lighthouse* 211). For her, what important is no longer its completion per se but the process towards the completion of the painting. Then “it was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision” (*Lighthouse* 211). After all the struggle and effort, Lily eventually accepts the powerful loss in the past through purifying and expressing it. As she lays down her brush, her creation vanishes as well. The loss in the past is experienced, processed, expressed, and at last accepted. As the last sentence of the entire book, the vision marks the permanent closure of everything inside it. She is eventually freed, at least symbolically. So is Woolf.



## EPILOGUE

In the late 1930s, Virginia Woolf revisited the 1910 “Manet and the Post-Impressionists” exhibition as she wrote a biography of Roger Fry after his death on September 9, 1934. In a section titled “The Post-Impressionists” in *Roger Fry: A Biography*, Woolf recollects her memory: “Now at the invitation of the directors of the Grafton Gallery he [Fry] had a chance to bring together a representative exhibition of those pictures in London” (*Biography* 152). She continues: “There they stood upon chairs the pictures that were to be shown at the Grafton Gallery bold, bright, impudent almost, in contrast with the Watts portrait of a beautiful Victorian lady that hung on the wall behind them” (*Biography* 152). Notwithstanding the apparent contrast, Woolf contends, “he [Fry] would explain that it was quite easy to make the transition from Watts to Picasso; there was no break, only a continuation. They were only pushing things a little further. He demonstrated; he persuaded; he argued” (*Biography* 152). Around the same time as Woolf was returning to her memories for Fry and the exhibition, she contemplated writing a new novel—*Between the Acts*, where she returns one final time to Fry and Bell’s aesthetics. Like Fry’s exhibition, *Between the Acts* pushes “things a little further.” In this final work, Woolf looks once more at Fry and Bell’s notions of “unity” and “significant form” and demonstrates her contemporary world as fragmented and art as simultaneously hopeful and doubtful. She persuades; she argues.

*Between the Acts* portrays a single day based around the performance of an annual pageant in an English village, where the Oliver family’s country house Pointz Hall is located. While the story takes place in 1939, on the eve of World War II, the book’s final draft was finished and posthumously published in 1941, when World War II had already begun. Located

now between the wars, the book describes what happens before, between, and after the acts of the pageant, and juxtaposes personal life and history, local life and general history, and explores questions of time and space. Throughout the novel, Woolf layers on different temporalities and represents the multiplicity of time in its synchronicity and asynchronicity. Then in an attempt to break the limits of time, Woolf represents what she perceives as an “essential truth” that Fry and Bell assert is crucial to “creative vision” and creates harmony out of that perception. Unlike Lily’s painting which symbolizes unity through synthesis and completion, Woolf’s central symbols negate the notion of time and space and unite the fragmented through juxtaposition and negation, achieving “a rambling capricious but somehow unified whole,” (*Diary*, vol. 5, 135). Woolf has three crucial examples of ekphrasis in *Between the Acts* where she explores the potentials and failures of the aesthetic: they are the two portraits hanging in Pointz Hall, the vase in the living room, and the end of the pageant.

In these ekphrastic moments, Woolf’s attempts to explore the possible harmony of different temporalities. In the scene in Pointz Hall, Woolf describes two portraits on the walls of the hall: “Two pictures hung opposite the window. In real life they had never met, the long lady and the man holding his horse by the rein. The lady was a picture, bought by Oliver because he liked the picture; the man was an ancestor. He had a name. He held the rein in his hand” (*Acts* 25). The two paintings appear to be husband and wife and to represent the family lineage, both its past and its continuation into the present. However, we are told that the two were not husband and wife and so occupy different time periods: the first period is when the ancestor is alive; the second is when the woman is painted; the third is when Oliver buys the picture of the lady; the fourth is when the present spectators see the pictures; and the fifth is the future time when the pictures are looked at.

This juxtaposition of different temporalities that creates a harmony of line, mass, and space is of more layers. The lady and the gentleman's pasts are not only different because of their time periods but also for their distinct genders and functions, "The lady was a picture," which indicates her position as an object (*Acts 25*). "Bought by Oliver because he liked the picture," the "long lady" is considered an exchangeable commodity valuable for her physical beauty and with neither name nor company, the lady owns no traceable history. In contrast, "The man was an ancestor" who "[holds] his horse by the rein" (*Acts 25*). With a "name," he is a "talk producer," who actively produces the family history as "an ancestor" (*Acts 25, 26*). As a man, he constructs the society and history in a patriarchal system, praised for his authority and dominance even after the death. Here again, the "imaginative life" and the "actual life" are associated with female and male respectively. While "the man [is] an ancestor" who has a "name" and an explicit history to track and treasure for its "prophetic" value, "the lady [is] a picture, bought by Oliver because he liked the picture" for its curious or aesthetic value.

While the painting of the gentleman embodies the traditional male role in the past, it also represents the contrast between personal time and familial time, through the implication of the interactive relationship between the ancestor and the Olivers today. On the one hand, "the man was an ancestor" (*Acts 25*). No matter who paints the gentleman according to whose likeness, the painting now hangs to represent the lineage of the family. Although "he had a name," his name is never mentioned. Only his family name is certain, "Oliver," which is received from and passes down to the family. Wanting the hound Colin to remain with him, the dead gentleman seems related to the alive Bartholomew Oliver, the head of the family today, who stays with his hound as well. As a "talk producer" for the family members today, the gentleman is only meaningful for

his kinship, and it is the family history, instead of himself, that he produces, and the others remember (*Acts 26*).

The gentleman is a man in the past, yet he is in two different pasts. When he asks the painter if there is “room for Colin” (his dog) and when he wishes the hound to be “buried at his feet,” he becomes individualized separated from his position as an “ancestor” (*Acts 25*).

By depicting all these differences within the two pictures in a single paragraph, Woolf challenges the limits of linear time in literature, and through “an extraordinary time compression,” the almost eternal time from the ancient beginning to the present is compacted into this small space of the room (*Acts xlv*). In this room and in her ekphrastic representation, Woolf combines multiple temporalities, private and the public history, female and male, and then says that the room also consists of what was before time as it is heard “singing of what was before time was” (*Acts 26*).

Yet the room is empty, and time is silent: “Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent. The room was a shell, singing of what was before time was; a vase stood in the heart of the house, alabaster, smooth, cold, holding the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence” (*Acts 26*). In the heart of the house stands a vase which holds “what was before time was,” which indicates its silent and meaningless nature (*Acts 26*). The white “alabaster” seems to refer to the null and void nature of time, that it is unmixed and unfilled with anything except its “silent” self (*Acts 26*). “Cold” similarly suggests the indifferent attitude of the time, as it is nothing and responds to nothing (*Acts 26*).

This negation of time and space can be seen as Woolf’s intentional action to break the limits of them to complete and endow her harmony of forms with her vision of “ultimate reality” or “essential truth” so that it can become a “significant form” and a work of art eventually. In

contrast to the fullness of Lily's painting, this is "Empty, empty, empty; silent, silent, silent" (*Acts* 26). In the heart of the house stands a vase, and the vase holds "the still, distilled essence of emptiness, silence" (*Acts* 26). There are no more distractions or disturbance, nothing of "actual life"; only the unity of form and essence is perceived and achieved in an image of absolute negation (*Acts* 26). At this moment, when she produces an image of "significant form" she feels no "aesthetic emotion" but only emptiness and silence (Bell 6). The work of art here provides no successful mourning or unification.

*Between the Acts* is haunted throughout by the image of the failure of art and human representation when, for example, there is a temporary suspension during the pageant, we are told:

The words died away. Only a few great names—Babylon, Nineveh, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Troy—floated across the open space. Then the wind rose, and in the rustle of the leaves even the great words became inaudible; and the audience sat staring at the villagers, whose mouths opened, but no sound came.

And the stage was empty. Miss La Trobe leant against the tree, paralyzed. Her power had left her. Beads of perspiration broke on her forehead. Illusion had failed. "This is death," she murmured, "death." (*Acts* 96)

Both Fry's "aesthetic vision" and "creative vision" are involved in the scene. The audiences look at the actors, but they stop perceiving any harmony of lines and colors. The villagers open their mouths, but they either perform nothing from their vision or lose their vision entirely. The two kinds of vision no longer appear together as they repeatedly do in *To the Lighthouse*. Instead, they blur and fade away. As the audiences and the performers/artists lose their visions, words themselves, for Woolf the fundamental representational symbol, are weakened and fail. Miss La Trobe--the director and playwright--realizes the failure of the play. The illusion of harmony and unity collapses. There is no harmony of forms and no unity of the fragmented and artificial world. "'This is death,' she murmured," but of what? Is this the death of the potential to unite the

fragments among human beings during the chaotic wars through art? Or is this the death of art itself?

In the final scene of the pageant, Woolf contemplates the aesthetics that she first encountered three decades earlier and positions them in her chaotic contemporary world. In this final scene entitled “Present Time. Ourselves,” La Trobe has the performers come in front of the audience carrying assorted reflective objects: the “tin cans,” “glass” and “silver mirrors” catch and reflect the audiences as they are who are “crashed; solved; united” into “the whole” and see “Ourselves! Ourselves!” (*Acts* 120, 126, 128, 130, 125). Time is stopped as Woolf writes, “The hands of the clock had stopped at the present moment. It was now. Ourselves” (*Acts* 126). After the cheval glass drops because of its heavy weight, the pageant reaches its climax. “Each is part of the whole,” the Rev. G. W. Streatfield delivers the sacred message to the audiences; “we act different parts; but are the same,” he continues; “scraps, orts and fragments! Surely, we should unite?” he concludes the first part of the speech (*Acts* 130, 131). It is neither about there or over there, nor about history or future, but only “ourselves” in the “present” (*Acts* 120). What matters is the moment—the presence of humans, the sounds of cows, and the flying over of “twelve aeroplanes” (*Acts* 131). The distinctions of different time and space no longer matter, the notion of them insignificant and illegitimate. The scene only emphasizes the moment, here and now.

Then the fragments of the moment are able to unite into a unified whole through a fragmented “Mirror” made up of fragments reflecting fragments (*Acts* 126). The “mirror” in this final scene symbolizes art itself. It is imaginative fantasy—a representation—but it is also authentic: it “snap[s] us as we are, before we’ve had time to assume” (*Acts* 125). Woolf’s fragmented mirror of fragments forms a temporary unification now by juxtaposing only fragments of the moment rather than synthesizing them and the memory.

Near the end of the book, the end of her final work, and the end of her life, Woolf writes:

The old people had gone up to bed. Giles crumpled the newspaper and turned out the light. Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night.

Isa let her sewing drop. The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.

Then the curtain rose. They spoke.

In her 1924 essay “Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown,” Woolf famously writes, “in or about December, 1910, human character changed” (2). Around that year, she claims that “All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature” (“Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown” 3). Since then, Woolf began her voyage out into the vast realm of the new visual art. In 1939, the Second World War broke out and changed human character once again. That year, Woolf was working on *Between the Acts* where she questions what she embraced decades ago. She did not live to see a new world, but like the end of the book, we all know:

Then the war between the acts ended. The acts began again.

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