

Ina Lipkowitz  
Reading Fiction

Essay 5 - due in Ses #26 (5 pages)

Choose one of the following and write a five page essay in which you do your best to convince readers to share your understanding of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* by using the novel's specific words, speeches, and scenes. Try your best to distinguish between observations and analyses. Try, too, to captivate your reader's interest in your opening and concluding paragraphs; strive toward a clear logical arrangement of paragraphs. Read out loud. Give your essay a thoughtful title, double space throughout, number your pages, and proofread very carefully. Remember that if you would like to explore another topic, talk to me ahead of time.

1.

With her foot on the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and took Minta's arm and left the room, it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past. (111)

In what sense can you argue that the triumphant dinner party at the end of "The Window" represents Mrs. Ramsay's equivalent of her husband's philosophical treatises, Lily Briscoe's painting, or Augustus Carmichael's poetry?

2.

James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white; he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse, was it?

No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other Lighthouse was true too. (186)

Although Woolf wrote in a letter that "directly I'm told what a thing means, it becomes hateful to me," clearly she used the lighthouse as a central symbol of her work. What does it mean to six-year-old James? to sixteen-year-old James? to Mrs Ramsay? to Mr Ramsay? to other characters? How can one image mean so many different things?

3. Why are most of the references to the Ramsays and their guests bracketed in "Time Passes," the second part of *To the Lighthouse*?

4. Why do you think Woolf specified that it was Prue Ramsay who both married and died in childbirth? Why was it Cam who survived and accompanied her father and brother to the lighthouse?

5.

“He has landed,” she said aloud. “It is finished.” (208)

Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (209)

Why does Woolf’s novel end by not merely juxtaposing Mr Ramsay’s arrival at the lighthouse and Lily’s completion of her painting but by representing them as simultaneous actions?