

How do the internal and external worlds combine in Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*?

Woolf's use of the stream of consciousness and the melding of different characters' perspectives, reveals how life is both an individualistic, solipsistic affair, but also a communal and external experience – a symbiotic and hermeneutic relationship. We exist in a state of fluidity between the internal and external, with any clear boundaries for the two not being as distinctly defined as we may think. It is important to define what is meant by the internal and the external; the inherent fluidity between the two makes this difficult, however. The internal can be defined from an individual perspective: each character as their own 'world' removed from all sources around them. The external, therefore, is all the other characters, experiences – the world beyond themselves. Through narrative techniques – such as stream of consciousness, and shifting and multiple perspectives – typography, and language, Woolf creates a decentred universe, which the reader must reconcile by rendering their own vantage points.

Woolf's narrative combines different time scales and frames, present and past, from different characters, tracking the intricate impressions and thoughts from a singular, seemingly insignificant second of life, while also meditating on the infinity of geologic time that is beyond human comprehension or existence. Despite the vast distance, physical and metaphorical, we can partake in eternity, linking the internal and external worlds into one mutual, and reciprocal state of being. For example, Lily states: "...because distant views seem to outlast by a million years (Lily thought) the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest." We see here that Mr. Bankes and Lily disagree on their appraisal of the scene; they each have their own internal interpretations about what they see before them, based on their experiences, their views, their interactions with others, and their own perceptions – what J. Piaget would call our schema – yet despite this, the ocean's serenity and enormity gestures at their smallness and mortality, linking their individual thoughts together, as they become part of the "earth entirely at rest". The ocean can be viewed as a symbol for the longevity of the natural world, for the characters and the readers, and for the longevity of human thought and perception, generation after generation. This is seen via the fact that Lily and Mr. Bankes are repeating the thought patterns of Mrs. Ramsey as she too looked on the ocean, indicating that there is a common way it is perceived (the external). This highlights that we may only think that the way we as individuals interpret and see the world as the only 'correct' way, when in fact each person is simultaneously existing and interpreting (sonder), contributing to our external understanding of the world. Mrs. Ramsey uses more lyrical language to describe her own ephemerality – and sought solace in her household affairs – Lily takes a broader view and ponders the ephemerality of humankind, showing the fluidity between internal and external perspective. In this way, the ocean comes to be a Rorschach test for personality; Woolf's stream of consciousness style allows the reader to access a variety of different interpretations within various characters' minds. This encourages the reader

themselves to account for our own symbolic interpretations – as we too are making sense of symbolism of the ocean in the exact same way as the characters (in a ‘meta’ sort of way).

We can also see the way once internal and personal life and achievements can be viewed and understood by others, despite the boundaries of time or language. Mr. Ramsey states that “the very stone one kicks with one’s boot will outlast Shakespeare.” Here, Mr. Ramsey is deep in thought on his own intellectual accomplishments, and those of others. He then suddenly relativises any legacy by comparing it to the immense scale of the natural world. Woolf reveals her preoccupation with scale: a character will often be lost in their own thoughts until something external, and belonging to nature, allows them perspective on their minuscule perspective, moving their mind out of their internal monologue, and into that of the external world, highlighting the fluid transformation between the two states. Human affairs are not presented as trivial and meaningless, even when compared to the enormity of the external world, but rather reinforcing how humans can create extensive meaning through their minds. The external world acts as inspiration and guidance for one’s internal narrative, and vice versa, with the two states becoming harmonious and complementary to the other. Indeed, though a stone may outlast Mr. Ramsey, his musings have taken up more page space in Woolf’s text, showing how the internal and external world’s can live through the other, and still be present. The reference to Shakespeare likewise calls into questions Woolf’s accomplishments as an author and whether her world will live on in literary history, showing how the external world (objects like books, poems) can give eternal life to the internal musings of an author and what they create. The allusion to the relative smallness of Shakespeare – despite Woolf’s many references to him throughout her texts – implicates a much-esteemed and personally-important author. Woolf thus explains how even a writer deemed essential for this very text will pale in comparison to the natural world.

Further connection between each character – each of their internal and individual worlds linking together to represent a human universality of condition – is seen through the use of pathetic fallacy and the anthropomorphism of the wind in *Time Passes*. As night falls, the novel’s narration changes dramatically as the narrator states: “...certain airs, detached from the body of the wind [the house was ramshackle after all] crept round corners and ventured indoors. Almost one might imagine them, as they entered the drawing-room, questioning and wondering, toying with the flap of hanging wallpaper asking, would it hang much longer, when would it fall?” The text no longer considers human interactions but instead muses on the behaviours of the natural environment and the passing of time, revealing the fluidity between each of these states. The wind is given human agency and perspective; the internal and individualistic nature of each person has been transferred over to the external and natural world around us in this state of transference and emergence. The process begins when Woolf differentiates

“certain airs” from the general wind, bestowing them with a special significance. These airs then gain the ability to act in specified ways as seen via the string of verbs: they “crept” and ‘ventured’; both verbs imply an intentionality to the movement. The narrator then puts forth the idea that they may even possess thoughts and desires – able to be “questioning and wondering” about the physical environment like the human occupants of the house. This shows that the attributes our internal world has – thoughts, perceptions, wonder – can be transferred to the external and natural world, such as to the wind. These descriptions are different from the earlier way that characters would attribute feelings to the ocean or lighthouse through the pathetic fallacy. The reader is no longer in a specific characters’ mind, but rather that of the omniscient narrator, who acts as a sort of bridge between the internal and external. Despite this, the fixation is still on decay and mortality, noting how “ramshackle” the house is when the wallpaper will fall, resonating with earlier worries from Mrs. Ramsey and others, stressing that there is a universal human concern with time passing and with decay. The text zooms out into an omniscient perspective, yet this consideration is still the unifying concern of the book, showing that internal concerns are both universal and external.

We see this further transition through time, the internal and external through the speed of narrative time continuing to accelerate, with the narrator observing rapidly the passing of many, many nights: “The winter holds a pack of [nights] in store and deals them equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers. They lengthen; they darken.” The images and perspectives are strikingly different here in *Time Passes* from the previous and subsequent sections. Beforehand, the slightest external event – such as the slightest change in weather – would induce pages of reflection from a character, reinforcing the significant impact the external has on the internal. Here, however, an entire season of nights is passed over in sentences: nights are deemed “a pack” as if they were cards being played out, highlighting how they dictate fate. Fate here is not presented as random however, but instead the metaphorical cards are given “equally, evenly, with indefatigable fingers.” As such, they are entirely uniform and consistent, never deviating or making special allowances with the final sentence reiterating this by making an entire winter the result of just two curt clauses. Indeed, the anaphoric repetition of “they” and the use of diacope quickens the pace. As such, Woolf shows human smallness in the face of the grand scale of time, but instead of placing these thoughts in the mind of characters, but in the style and images of descriptive language itself, showing how internal and external perceptions can be transferred between. She therefore moves from individual rumination on time to showing the way that human minds have diluted their own importance – which fades away in this broader narrative.

It is also important to consider the effect of memory – whether that be through other people, objects, or history. The reader observes the importance of relics that linger after experience, and the novel holds up many different forms of memory. For example, there is the history book memory of impartially and sparsely recounted events as

demonstrated in the bullet-like plot points of Part 2, Time Passing. There is also the circular memory Mrs. Ramsey has thinking back on her youth, recognising in her children's youth their own future memories, and feeling life to be a cycle of marriage and childbearing passed on from generation to generation – with the internal and external processes themselves being hermeneutical, as well as together. There is the living memory of Mrs. McNab and Lily as their recollected images of Mrs. Ramsey appear visible on the surface of the present world, reinforcing how one's internal memory, via external objects, can offer the possibility of eternity against time. As such, the novel presents the different measures of time (external) out of which individual experience is composed.

We also see the difference between the internal and external through each of the character's varying perspectives on what the meaning of life is. Each character questions life's meaning and supply different answers based on their own perspectives and on the circumstances that surround their questioning (the external). For example, Lily thinks life's greatest meaning lies in making art, combining her internal purpose with an external method of doing so. However, each of the characters experiences a heavy sense of doubt, never feeling truly satisfied with what purpose they have decided on. No matter what meaning they decide upon, a character's perspective on life is always affected by that character's relationship to time (the external seamlessly invading the internal). The characters can feel life is worthwhile and meaningful when they feel that human action transcends mortality to endure the ages or while they are able to luxuriate in the present moment and feel the breadth of a human lifespan. This can be done through the use of external sources. For example, Mr. Ramsey, when reading Sir Walter Scott, feels that the ongoing torch of human accomplishment passed from person to person is much more meaningful than the identity of each individual torch carrier. Thinking this way, he no longer worries about his own achievements and feels happy knowing that his work in philosophy will be carried on by other thinkers in the future. This highlights the fact that we as individuals have our own personal and individual achievements and perspectives, but they can affect the external world and indeed be carried on by external forces and influences. Similarly, Mr. Bankes, after tasting Mrs. Ramsey's beef dish at dinner, is finally grounded in the pleasure of the moment and can thereby see the merit in domestic rituals he has previously considered meaningless. We also see the way in which the external world can influence and help one understand their own internal world through the use of pathetic fallacy: "...the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again... 'I am guarding you - I am your support' but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kind meaning..." Mrs. Ramsey suddenly becomes preoccupied by the sound of the waves outside, as she observes how the ocean can be both calming and frightening depending on the context

in which she hears it, revealing how the external world has the power to influence different internal worlds within ourselves and others. Through using pathetic fallacy, be it describing a natural phenomenon as if it has human emotion, when in fact the emotion actually belonged to the speaker of the poem or the poet; it is a fallacy because the body of water is not actually supportive or remorseless, but rather becomes a vehicle for Mrs. Ramsey to make sense of her own emotional state. The external world thus can directly impact our own internal understanding and emotional state, and help one realise their perceptions. Woolf takes the pathetic fallacy out of an isolated moment and instead makes it the subject of longer musings by different characters throughout the text (connecting them through this technique): she exposes and complicates the term by making Mrs. Ramsey aware of the fact that her perceptions of the ocean change depending on her mood and state of mind. This highlights how one internal world can therefore also impact the external world. As such, the internal and external become a fluid state of perception and understanding, working in all directions, and not just a one-way cycle. In Mrs. Ramsey's specific case, the emotional significance of the waves depends on whether they are accompanied by a "task". When she is preoccupied in her own endeavours, fulfilling her maternal role, their largeness is soothing. On the other hand, when she can focus fully on their existential "measure of life," she becomes more philosophical and worries about the smallness, the "ephemeral" quality of her life in comparison to the ocean's scale. Thus, we can see Mrs. Ramsey's character as one who finds significance and peace in her task – one for whom the ocean brings solace to contextualise these tasks, but if focused on solely, will unleash an abstract anxiety about time and meaning. This reveals the connection between one's internal tasks and being that can impact the way they interpret the external world.

This is seen again when Lily questions "What is the meaning of life? That was all – a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years.... there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one." Lily questions whether there is no such transcendental and abstract meaning, and that significance is only located in small occurrences. This reveals Lily's new age and maturity: ten years before, she harboured more high-minded principles about her art, yet time, witnessing deaths, and a World War have narrowed her idealistic dreams and caused her to locate beauty in ephemeral and unintentional moments as small as "matches struck unexpectedly". Typically, the characters and the narrator's voice have often turned to the natural environment to try to make sense of life and to perhaps search for a "great revelation", despite this, they are only ever moved to wonder about human mortality and insignificance, which demeans the meaning of life instead of answering it. Woolf instead locates meaning in the smallness of human interactions – in the way Mrs. Ramsey perceives a dinner event or executes an interaction with her husband. To wonder about and expand the maleness of humanity is the source of "daily

miracles”, revealing how the external world can provide internal purpose and meaning. On a smaller scale, we see these various ideas of meaning through the diverse ways Mr and Mrs. Ramsey view and read literature. Mrs. Ramsey seeks an energising progression to the climax of a text, whereas Mr. Ramsey seeks the confirmation in text that he need not worry about personal achievement. Mrs. Ramsey looks for ecstatic unity, and Mr. Ramsey hopes for affirming peace. Woolf shows, then, how these different characters’ perceptions of reality also dictate their interpretations of and expectations of literature – a clever comment on how differently people will interpret her own novel. However, there is, ultimately, no one meaning of life and, instead of reaching for one, the novel shows that meaning is subjective, contingent upon circumstance and perspective, revealing the fluidity between external and internal, both influencing the other. Each life, then, contains many ‘meanings’, which shift and change from year to year, from moment to moment.

Written as a stream of consciousness, the novel constantly investigates the contours and patterns of human thought through its form and style. Even when writing within the perspective of a single character, Woolf’s sentences leap back and forth between various impressions, memories, and emotions, formally illustrating the associative nature of an individual mind, in the sense that the internal is not without its external influences. Lofty thoughts stand on par with everyday ones. For example, Mrs. Ramsey’s mind leaps between thoughts on the nature of compassion, the relationship between men and woman, household budgeting, her children’s futures, the state of her society, and the state of her beef dish that she will be serving for dinner, revealing how the external world has significant influence to impact one’s internal thoughts, and so they no longer become as distinguishable as before, due to the mind’s ability for such quicksilver change resulting from the vast colour of the external world. The mind is also capable of extended preservation. For example, Lily’s mind lingers on Mr. Tansley’s insult for the next ten years, even after she has forgotten who has said it.

Woolf consistently leaps back and forth between the minds of different characters, connecting each of their internal worlds into one that is viewable and understandable to the reader. Though everyone’s mind shares an associative, eclectic tendency, individual minds are also distinguishable enough from one another that Woolf sometimes does not even need to indicate that she has leapt from one person’s perspective to another’s, as each of their narratives are distinguishable enough from others. As the novel slides in and out of different character’s minds, its figuration further suggests that the divide between internal and external life might not be so rigid after all. Repeating metaphors of the mind as a pool of water and as a beehive transform abstract, private thought into a concrete, shared element of the natural world. Each aspect of the novel speaks to the diversity of interior life: the diversity of disparate thoughts within an individual stream of consciousness as well as the diversity of different thoughts and thought patterns that characterise different individuals’ streams of consciousness. Lily reflects at the end of

the novel that in order to see Mrs. Ramsey clearly a person would need “fifty pairs of eyes” (since each of those pairs would have such different insights into her character) can be read as a description of the novel itself: written through many separate pairs of eyes to achieve the most complete vision possible. This shows how many internal perspectives are required for one to understand the external.

We see the varying perspectives possible when Mrs. Ramsey recalls her and Tansley’s walk during which he manages to grab hold of her bag. Tansley basks in the joy of accompanying her and playing a traditional masculine role. This pride is notably contrasted with Mrs. Ramsey’s earlier resistances to him holding it. That rejection seemed to resist the very codes of chivalry Mrs. Ramsey has praised, and here she lapses back into the traditional role much to Tansley’s delight. Mrs. Ramsey’s thoughts on the interaction were conveyed in a series of complicated assessments, whilst Tansley’s are oddly reductive and straightforward. He offers little compelling or not notable analysis on the situation and feels just as banal “pride” for being with “a beautiful woman”. This disjoint narrative voice reveals the varying perceptions of each of the characters. Mrs. Ramsey has much power over men, in which she can cause his entire perception of reality to shift with relative ease, and so Tansley’s internal world is changed by his external interactions with another, despite Tansley being supremely unperceptive. Woolf is able to illuminate this difference by bestowing on certain characters more complete and nuanced opinions. Thus, her narration style allows her to show the disconnect in the way Tansley and Mrs. Ramsey would experience their walk; one will find great depths of significance and complexity; another will just see general beauty and pride. Despite these differences, one can influence the other – the external influencing the internal.

This is also seen through the way Mr and Mrs. Ramsey disagree about the value of fact. Mrs. Ramsey states that “to pursue truth with such astonishing lack of consideration for other people’s feelings, to rend the thin veils of civilisation so wantonly, so brutally, was to [Mrs. Ramsey] so horrible an outrage of human decency...”. They both have opposite opinions, with Mrs. Ramsey arguing that the quest for truth is only meaningful if accompanied by a sense of human decency. However, Mrs. Ramsey uses similarly inflated language as Mr. Ramsey. He saw himself as having travelled through “The Valley of death” whilst Mrs. Ramsey describes him as a “pelt of jagged hail, the drench of dirty water”. Thus, they both recreate their own identities to fulfil their argument. If Mr. Ramsey’s language was ironically untruthful, Mrs. Ramsey’s is paradoxically uncouth. She complains of how Mr. Ramsey can “rend the thin views of civilisation,” but her own sentence is similarly “wantonly” in that it is thought immediately without any self-editing. Woolf hence highlights the disjunct between our logically formulated opinions and the way in which our immediate opinions are phrased (the internal and the external – the way we should act, versus what is more intrinsic and natural to us). The split between the factual Mr. Ramsey and the courteous Mrs. Ramsey is only the tip of the

iceberg that obscured an entire psychic complexity within each of their minds. Woolf again points out how radically differently people view their experiences and, even as we might construct a binary between the two of them (or between men and woman in general), their internal experience may reveal more commonality than first perceived – external influences impacting each of the characters’ internal worlds. Indeed, this opposition to a binary view of life mirrors that of a post-structuralist reading. Binaries do not exist in the novel, just as they do not in real life, but rather a fluidity between all states, with all things coming together, as nothing occurs in isolation.

Similarly, in *The Window*, James reflects on the moment of conflict he has just watched between his parents; he is unable to understand the deeper social context of what they say and relates to it as a violent ritual. Through the use of many different double meanings in the phrase: “...the arid scimitar of the male, which smote mercilessly, again and again, demanding sympathy” we see both the actual emotional demand being made by Mr. Ramsey and the weirdly epic struggle that James envisions between his parents. For example, “arid” can mean both physically dry and metaphorically lacking in excitement. Woolf’s language is far more ornate and verbose than that used by a child of James’ age. Though a child might imagine his parents as mythic archetypes, he would never articulate the concepts as such. Thus, Woolf’s own internal language as an author (James’ external world), impacts the language and internal perception and reasoning of the characters she creates. This can help us clarify the perspective and post of the limited omniscient narrator, who adopts the perspective of different characters but not necessarily their vocabulary. By maintaining an autonomous control of the language, Woolf is able to both point to the external reality of the events and the way they are internally processed by each character.

As it examines the nature of interior life, the novel also examines the nature of art and beauty, giving credence to commonly accepted understandings even as it puts forth alternative definitions. This is done to show how art (an external force) impacts internal thought: the literature the characters read gives joy and consolation, as Mrs. Ramsey delights in the loveliness of the sonnet’s words and Scott’s prose frees Mr. Ramsey from anxiety about his public image. Indeed, Mrs. Ramsey’s human beauty consoles and inspires: those around her admire her and feel strengthened by her spirit. The novel also considers beauty maker’s; the characters of Lily and Mr. Carmichael afford a view on art in the process of being created by as-yet unestablished artists, and how springs unexpected from unlovely circumstances. For example, through Lily’s meagre existence, self-doubts, and despair, arrives the painting she completes in the novel’s last section. The novel does not just limit the making of beauty to the production of fine art objects; it understands human conduct and daily life as a form of art also. In broadening our understanding of art and beauty, the novel shifts the emphasis from finished product to process – rather than limiting art to concrete, enduring, delimited artefacts, the novel shows that art can also be a spirit, a frame of mind, a form of vision.

This break away from the concrete mirrors the concrete boundaries of internal and eternal being demolished as art and beauty enter each of the character's internal understanding of the world around them.

We see the tension between the external and internal world through Lily's musings on her own painting. She observes that "then beneath the colour there was the shape. She could see it all so clearly...it was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing changed." Here, Lily reflects on her artistic short-comings and on the division between conceptualising a work of art and executing it (internal versus external). Lily differentiates, here, between different elements that compose the painting. She sees the surface being the result of "colour" and below that the "shape"—not the shape in terms of the physical objects in the canvas, but rather the abstract idea that will be conveyed with the materials of "colour." That she can "see" this invisible idea seems to indicate it would be easy to manifest in the painting, yet she finds the opposite to be true. "The picture" of her internal mind and "her canvas" of external production do not immediately connect (although these two states are used to create the other), and, in the space between the two, "the demons set on her." That is to say, there are corrupting elements between the "conception" of imagining a work to its actual manifestation – there is space between the internal and external worlds. Woolf is using Lily as a case study to speak about the broader process of artistic creation and, of course, about her novel itself. Art, she explains, suffers from a fundamental disjoint between what we see in the world, what we can imagine, and what we can represent. This is a subtle critique of realist writing—against which Woolf's prose responded—that had traditionally assumed that the novel should be a perfect representation of external reality. Lily's character shows that even in a visual medium like painting that equivalence of "picture" and "canvas" is impossible. This thus justifies and explores Woolf's idea that writing will similarly diverge from simply recounting events—due to the "demons" that enter the writer's mind. This highlights the fact that whilst the external may influence the internal, and vice versa, that they are not the same as each other, and that each person's internal and external will be different to someone else's, due to their own understanding and perception of both states.

Beauty's significance on the internal and external is also seen through the interactions of Mr. Bankes and Mrs. Ramsey: "For always, [Mr Bankes] thought, there was something incongruous to be worked into the harmony of [Mrs. Ramsey's] face. Mrs. Ramsay is now measuring a stocking, but the scene has slowly zoomed out into first her own mind and then to an external narrative, showing the easy fluidity between the two states. Here, the narrator takes on the perspective of Mr. Bankes to reflect on the odd constitution of Mrs. Ramsay's beauty. What Mr. Bankes fixates on is the difference between an external beauty and a beauty constituted by internal character and by the action inspired by that character. This is what is "incongruous" and what therefore cannot be explained just by a visual "face." To make sense of this, Mr. Bankes cites more

energetic and erratic behaviours of Mrs. Ramsay—stressing that her character is far from pristine and vacant, and thus he is able to ‘see’ the internal form of Mrs. Ramsey. He summarises this “something incongruous” as “the quivering thing, the living thing,” asserting that while it may be odd in some sense, it also provides a source of stimulation and vigour. Indeed, it is the thing that makes her “living,” that makes her human. This passage speaks to the exact literary strategy Woolf employs when describing Mrs. Ramsay. Traditional, realist writing would only convey physical details and actions taken by a character, but Woolf delves deeply into Mrs. Ramsay’s mind—as if she herself wants to render for us “the quivering thing.” Indeed, Mr. Bankes’ reference to integrating that quality “into the picture” stresses the importance of human interiority in art like that of Lily or Woolf herself. The text implies that pictures alone will miss the living essence of someone, and that artists must remember to include this quality in their work.

We also see how intentional and actionable internal thought can transform the external into something meaningful and worthwhile. The narrative voice states that “It partook, [Mrs. Ramsay] felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she has already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change...of such moments, she thought, the things is made that remains for ever after. This would remain.” Mrs. Ramsay breaks into this moving commentary during the dinner scene. Though she has previously focused on small human interactions, alternatively appreciating, and complaining about the behaviour of others, here she sees the moment as beautiful and timeless. This contrast between banal dinner interactions and Mrs. Ramsay’s sudden rapture can be seen already in the first line. Woolf separates the sentence into “It partook...of eternity” with a clause on the distribution of dinner meat, stressing how the aesthetic merit of the scene is the result of how a human mind frames the otherwise meaningless occurrences. What constitutes this merit, for Mrs. Ramsay, is the structural unity of the event: its “coherence” and “stability” that mark it more as a permanent work of art as opposed to a fleeting moment. Again, this sense does not reflect any actual permanence in the events, which are far from “immune to change”: rather, they have appeared to Mrs. Ramsay’s mind in such a way that they seem archetypal and sanctified—and thus able to “remain.” The passage brings together several important themes in the novel. It summons the spectre of human mortality by fixating repeatedly on the eternity of the scene: Mrs. Ramsay regards it with fascination because it seems to escape the laws of time that have preoccupied her throughout the day. That it does so by appearing to be a work of art reiterates the importance various characters have given to their artistic pursuits—but also points out that an artwork is less the providence of sculpture or painting, and far more the result of human perception (the external providing a means for the internal to be expressed and understood by other external forces – other characters). Through her vision, Mrs.

Ramsay has transformed the scene before her into a piece of art that “would remain” and thus redeems any human triviality. This highlights how the internal perception directly impacts the external world, with beauty and art bringing the two together. Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay’s behaviour is in itself a type of art, bringing harmony to social interactions, much like a painter seeks to take disparate elements and unify them into something beautiful or meaningful. A work of art, the text implies, is not determined by the medium of painting or literature, but rather by the power and longevity of what is produced. As a result, a memory can become just such an artistic object, which serves to further democratise the process. Indeed, “Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent)—this was of the nature of a revelation.” Lily connects her memories of Mrs. Ramsay to her realisation about the meaning of life. She concludes that the two pursued identical goals of giving the fleeting moment a more eternal existence. That Lily defines “a revelation” as “making of the moment something permanent” reiterates the importance of eternity to the definition of meaning and artwork. It develops the idea that significance comes from “daily miracles” but extends the earlier passage to claim that those ephemeral moments must somehow be stretched into “something permanent.” Human life is thus not inherently aesthetic, but it can become so if a skilled enough artist can stretch it throughout time to create “a revelation.” For Lily, this happens through painting, while for Mrs. Ramsay it is a matter of creating and examining social scenes. As is the case throughout the novel, Woolf’s use of parenthesis complicates the narrative perspective. Parentheses are often used in the novel to switch narratorial voice and to offer an alternative or broader perspective on the scene—or on a character’s thoughts. Here, they directly link Mrs. Ramsay and Lily’s forms of art, but it remains unclear whether Lily herself is defining the similarity, or if the narrator is doing it for her. The ambiguity is important because whoever speaks the parentheses is creating their own sort of eternal artwork: by linking Mrs. Ramsay’s behaviour to Lily’s, the parenthetical speaker is themselves defining an idea that stretches across time and across people and thus has itself “a more eternal existence.” In a sense, that artist is Woolf, for she as a writer is the one who has connected moments across years, aestheticised them, and written them into eternity through the novel.

We also see that “[Lily] went on tunnelling her way into her picture; into the past.” As she paints, Lily continues to ponder old memories, and here she turns to fantasising about Paul and Minta’s failed marriage despite having little information about the actual event. She notes that creating these stories in one’s mind is an odd but necessary way to make sense of other people. The description once more equates art and memory, here through a parallel clause: Lily is “tunnelling” more deeply into her “picture” and simultaneously into “the past.” She asserts that both have an element of consistency across time that allows a transient moment to become permanent, and both provide

sufficiently solid ground for someone to “tunnel.” Despite its earnest philosophical intent, this is a slightly ironic comparison, considering that Lily has falsified the past by making up stories about Paul and Minta. Yet this is itself a similarity between “picture” and “past,” for while both might seem to be objective representations of reality, they can both contain falsehoods or half-mistakes. Memory, Lily implies, is susceptible to the tastes and skills of the artist, just like a painting. Their significance depends not on the reality of the external event, but rather on how skilfully the painter or rememberer has defined the aesthetics of their internal perception.

To conclude, we see the melding of the internal and external through the multiple perspectives and sense of *sonder* within the novel. Woolf’s novel returns repeatedly to the idea that people experience external reality vastly differently, constantly misunderstanding each other as a result. Yet by creating a common set of thoughts, images, and conclusions in their minds, she also points out a consistency in human nature that can provide the basis for mutual experience. Her seamless shifting between each of the character’s minds, zooming in and then out, reflects the fluidity between the internal and external. The external for one character is actually another character’s internal. The fact that another character can invade the internal monologue of the character currently ‘speaking’ – through the use of brackets – reflects the interconnectivity present in humanity, transcending any boundaries, comprehensible or not. As such the internal and external do not necessarily ‘combine’, as they are one to begin with – we just are not aware of it at the present moment.

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