

Lily's Artifice and Mr. Ramsey's Work in To the Lighthouse

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A Comparison of Lily's Artifice and Mr. Ramsey's Work in *To the Lighthouse*

In Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Mr. Ramsey's lone philosophical work is contrasted against Lily's encompassing paintings. Both Lily's and Mr. Ramsey's professions require sacrifices; Lily gives up the ideal marital life whereas Mr. Ramsey has his wife forfeit her happiness to restore his. Through his work, Mr. Ramsey is able to build himself up and look as though he is a strong male figure. Lily also finds strength within her artistry, rejecting the traditional "mother-woman" image and taking on an identity that is unique in her society. Mr. Ramsey's and Lily's process of thinking are particular to their work; a philosopher must think in linear terms to get to a final conclusion whereas a [painter](#) has to envision and dream up their art in symbols, shapes and more abstract images. As Mr. Ramsey grows older, he loses sight of his original intentions as an artisan and ends up worrying more about the immortality of his work than the content. Lily, on the other hand, focuses on the continuity and harmony that her paintings portray. Lily wants to capture the essence of life; Mr. Ramsey cannot do so because he cannot fully express his emotions without a conduit such as Mrs. Ramsey. Without Mrs. Ramsey, he is not a whole self,

which makes his work lack the original enlightenment it once held. Mrs. Ramsey fuels Lily's and Mr. Ramsey's work in different ways; Lily receives her "vision"(209) through Mrs. Ramsey's past [motherly](#) presence and Mr. Ramsey needs her to energize his often [sinking](#) spirits. Whether they are occupied within the artists themselves or others surrounding them, martyrs are needed to construct the art ...

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...to the world. Mr. Ramsey, who requires another's energy to generate his work, is ultimately left alone in the world. He wanders aimlessly looking for Mrs. Ramsey to help him give birth to new ideas but she is no longer there. Although he has gotten exactly what he wished for, solitude brings him despair and unhappiness; he cannot be complete without his wife by his side. Lily is able to free herself through the completion of the painting depicting mother and child. With the conclusion of this artwork, she finally has a matriarchal figure in her life and is free from the oppression of society's stereotypical female role. She describes this painting as being "intimate" because she shared something very personal with Mrs. Ramsey: the ability to give life.

Work Cited

Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. Florida: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1927.

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