

CHARACTER SKETCH OF Mrs.RAMSAY.

Mrs. Ramsay emerges from the novel's opening pages not only as a woman of great compassion and broad-mindedness but also as a minder. Certainly, her primary goal is to reserve her youngest son James's sense of anticipation and curiosity surrounding the lighthouse. Though she realizes that Mr. Ramsay is correct in declaring that foul weather will collapse the next day's voyage, she continues in declaring James that the trip is a opportunity. She does so not to raise expectations that will inevitably be dashed, but rather because she realizes that the beauties and pleasures of this world are ephemeral and should be preserved, protected, and cultivated as much as possible. So deep is this commitment that she behaves similarly to each of her guests, even those who do not deserve or appreciate her kindness. Before heading into town, for example, she insists on asking Augustus Carmichael, whom she senses does not like her, if she can bring him anything to make his stay more comfortable. Similarly, she tolerates the insufferable behavior of Charles Tansley, whose bitter attitude and awkward manners threaten to undo the delicate work she has done toward making a pleasant and inviting home.

As Lily Briscoe notes in the novel's final section, Mrs. Ramsay feels the need to play this role primarily in the company of men. Indeed, Mrs. Ramsay feels obliged to protect the entire opposite sex. According to her, men shoulder the burden of ruling countries and managing economies. Their important work, she believes, leaves them vulnerable and in need of constant reassurance, a service that women can and should provide. Although this dynamic fits squarely into traditional gender

boundaries, it is important to note the strength that Mrs. Ramsay feels. At several points, she is aware of her own power, and her posture is far from that of a submissive woman. At the same time, interjections of domesticated anxiety, such as her refrain of “the bill for the greenhouse would be fifty pounds,” undercut this power. Ultimately, as is evident from her meeting with Mr. Ramsay at the close of “The Window,” Mrs. Ramsay never compromises herself. Here, she is able masterfully to satisfy her husband’s desire for her to tell him she loves him without saying the words she finds so difficult to say. This scene displays Mrs. Ramsay’s ability to bring together disparate things into a whole. In a world marked by the ravages of time and war, in which everything must and will fall apart, there is perhaps no greater gift than a sense of unity, even if it is only temporary. Lily and other characters find themselves grasping for this unity after Mrs. Ramsay’s death.

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