Epiphany and Closure in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

Marina Ludwigs

theludwigs@comhem.se

Virginia Woolf's 1927 *To the Lighthouse* ends on a strange note. Its moment of narrative closure is both satisfactory and unsatisfactory. On the one hand, it is perfect, almost too perfect in the way two narrative strands come together and reinforce each other in their mutual culmination. There is the story of going to the lighthouse: James Ramsay expresses his wish to go to the lighthouse in Part One; his wish is finally fulfilled at the end of Part Three, ten years later. What heightens the ending of this quest-like plot is the ending of another subplot: Lily Briscoe's search for the artistic means of finishing her paining (and, in a larger sense, her role as a female artist). As Lily watches the boat touch land, she experiences an epiphanic moment—a sudden inspiration about how to complete her painting (with "a line . . . in the centre" (TTL 226)). Thus the boat is arriving and Lily is putting the finishing touches on her painting at the same time: both subplots have been resolved. On the other hand, there is something about this congruity that feels artificial, contrived, empty even. It is presented as the moment of closure, but it does not feel like closure because the natural rhythm of the rising and falling action is compromised. Due to the unusually long deferral of the ending, the emotional charge that is supposed to fuel the coda has already dissipated by the time the event finally occurs, making the ending sound a hollow, anticlimactic note. Is this done deliberately? Is the artificial resolution without a sense of closure of a piece with other formal experiments of modernist fiction or is there more to it? I think, that the answers are: "yes," "yes," and "yes." Something other than/in addition to a familiar unraveling of literary form is taking place here. The novel's peremptory, self-consciously imposed performance of narrative closure does more than deconstruct the novelistic structure by undermining the idea of closure. It creates, as I will show, a metanarrative awareness of the originary structure of narrative, organized around the aesthetic moment of literary epiphany, which itself lays bare what Eric Gans calls "the becoming-portable of the sign" (SI 84).

In addition to being emotionally unsatisfactory, the plot of Virginia Woolf's novel is almost parodic in the way it implements the narrative pattern of the quest. The story, which is loosely based on the lives of Virginia Woolf's parents, features the Ramsays (Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and their eight children), who host several guests in their summer house on the Isle of Skye. The first part, "The Window," spans one summer day, which happens some time before World War I. It starts with little James's request to go to the Lighthouse and ends

late in the evening, after a dinner party, with the trip postponed. The second, impressionistically-written, part, “Time Passes,” spans ten years, which include the war. Unusually enough, it centers on the setting of the summer house itself, which is abandoned by the family, and follows the changes and decay that are taking place. In the third part, “The Lighthouse,” Mr. Ramsay and two of the children, including James, return (sans Mrs. Ramsay, who is now dead) but together with some of the previous guests. At the end of the novel, Mr. Ramsay and the two grown children go to the lighthouse, observed by two guests: Augustus Carmichael, a poet, and Lily Briscoe, an amateur painter and one of the novel’s main focalizers.

On the face of it, the novel has the shape of a quest (in, at least, two or three senses, depending on how loosely we define “the quest”). On the plot-driven level, it tells a story of a wish fulfillment or the story of a boy who wants to go to the lighthouse and does, eventually, go to the lighthouse, albeit ten years later. But the novel can also be interpreted as a quest in a metaphorical sense, as we focus on the character-driven aspect of the story. Read as a family drama, the plot of *To the Lighthouse* develops along the narrative arc of redemption in a story of a distant father who eventually reconciles with his son. The narrative opens with Mr. Ramsay’s contradicting his wife’s promise to go to the lighthouse by saying that the weather will certainly be bad. At this, young James, disappointed by Mr. Ramsay’s habitual lack of empathy, “would have gashed a hole in his father’s breast and killed him”: “Such were the extremes of emotion that Mr. Ramsay excited in his children’s breasts by his mere presence” (TTL 8). As for Mrs. Ramsay, she is not oblivious to James’s reaction, thinking that this disappointment will imprint itself permanently on her son’s memory: “he will remember that all his life,” for “children never forget” (TTL 68-69). James’s resentment is finally addressed (and redressed) at the very end, when James, Cam, and the father go to the lighthouse. We view this moment from the point of view of each of the three participants. First, the father is oblivious to the two teenage children as they are watching their father and brooding over their childhood grudges. As James tries his hand at steering the boat, he is praised for his effort by Macalister, a fisherman who is accompanying the family to the lighthouse. “But his father never praised him, James thought grimly” (TTL 221). However, just before they arrive, the normally overcritical father says “Well done,” at which, the sister, Cam, thinks to herself: “You’ve got it at last. For she knew that this was what James had been wanting, and she knew that now he had got it he was so pleased . . . that he was not going to let anybody take away a grain of his pleasure. His father had praised him” (TTL 223). This marks the point of the fulfilment of James’s psychological quest, the moment of reconciliation with his father.

Lastly, the ending resolves another narrative thread, the story of a painting, or rather the story of Lily Briscoe’s process of creating and completing a painting. As an amateur woman painter (“one could not take her painting very seriously” (TTL 21)), Lily struggles with self-doubt throughout the novel. As she tries to paint, knowing that, in the end, her paintings “would be hung in the attics” or “rolled up and flung under a sofa” (TTL 193), she is

distracted by Charles Tansley's, Mr. Ramsay's assistant's, voice in her head: "women can't paint, women can't write" (TTL 54). Despite this, Lily, who is quite ambitious and *au courant* with the formal experiments of her time, has her own compelling artistic "vision" (TTL 60), which she finds difficult to explain to the uninitiated, such as William Bankes, Mr. Ramsay's colleague. Mr. Bankes's dated ideas about art cannot, for example, accommodate the motivation behind abstracting a mother-and-child image (Mrs. Ramsay's reading to James) into a purple triangle. Such hollowing out of referential content clashes with his understanding that "mother and child" are "objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother [is] famous for her beauty" (TTL 59). When Lily tries to explain to him that she is interested in "relations of masses, of light and shadows," he finds this thought novel and plans to subject it to "scientific examination" (TTL 59). We follow Lily as she tries to solve the problem of her painting by figuring out "how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left" without breaking the unity of the painting (TTL 60). During the protracted dinner scene, central to "The Window," Lily tunes out the surrounding conversation to return to her painting and rethink the composition: "She took up the salt cellar and put it down again on a flower in the pattern in the table-cloth, so as to remind herself to move the tree" (TTL 92-3).

Even though the painting remains unfinished during the visit described in part one, its idea is taken up again in part three, when Lily returns. She remembers that "there had been a problem about a foreground of a picture. . . . It had been knocking about in her mind all these years" (TTL 161). But now "it seemed as if the solution had come to her: she knew now what she wanted to do" (TTL 161). Prompted by inspiration, she is able to overcome doubt and start painting, settling into a rhythm where everything falls into place, only to be later arrested and distressed by a thought that "she could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay [on the boat, approaching the lighthouse] and the picture" (TTL 209). It seems that her solution has deceived her, and for a moment, Lily feels despondent, frustrated with "the human apparatus for painting or for feeling; it always broke down at the critical moment" (TTL 209-10). She resolves to wait for the return of her inspiration, and, in the end, it is there for her. As the boat touches the shore, she is struck by a revelation, a sudden knowledge of what is missing and how she should complete her painting:

There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. 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 centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision (TTL 226).

Of the two subplots, the surface one, about Mr. Ramsay and James (both as a story of arrival

and father-son reconciliation), lacks satisfactory closure, in my opinion. Such things are subjective, to some degree, but I would suggest that many other readers would share my impression that the sense of narrative anticipation and release is violated due to "improper" narrative dynamics. The resolving incident is too far removed from the inciting incident, both in terms of the *fabula* and of *sujet* (story and plot), compromising the emotional logic of the story.

By speaking of "emotional logic," I am alluding to various reader-response friendly narratological accounts that pay attention to the temporal unfolding of the plot. According to Meir Sternberg, for example, the reading experience is structured by navigating "a dynamic system of gaps" (EM 50). The reader is compelled to revise his understanding of the plot in response to a surprising event that sheds new light on his previous construction of the fictional world. This revision is an ongoing process, being continually stimulated by the narrative interests of curiosity and suspense. The former aims to close the gaps of knowledge, addressing itself to the questions of "what happened?" and "why?" The latter is oriented toward the future, as a clash of hope and fear. Curiosity and suspense are dynamic and temporal properties that are balanced with each other via the structure of retardation (such as reversals, digressions, etc.) in order to heighten tension and increase the impact of the ending. As Sternberg puts it: "retardatory structure relates directly to the temporal nature of narrative . . . The fact that the text is communicated and apprehended along a continuum makes possible (and to some extent entails) a gradual and controlled unfurling of information, and hence a lively play of expectations throughout" (EM 161-163). Heta Pyrhönen, in his entry on retardatory devices in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative theory*, also stresses the affective temporality of perception by saying that these devices "contribute to our sense of narrative dynamics" and, "by suggesting that there is a goal to reach, but one that will not be attained through the fastest route, they retard our perception of the narrated whole" (NT 499).

Similarly, David Velleman, who argues for the emotional logic of narratives, says that emotions are "essentially diachronic— . . . their nature consists in how they unfold over time" (NE 13). In his view, our understanding of plots is indissoluble from our emotional understanding: "a description of events qualifies as a story in virtue of its power to initiate and resolve an emotional cadence in the audience. . . . A story . . . enables its audience to assimilate events, not to familiar patterns of how things happen, but rather to familiar patterns of how things feel. . . . Thus, the audience of a story understands the narrated events, first, because it knows how they feel, in the sense that it experiences them as leading it through a natural emotional sequence; and second, because it knows how it feels about them" (NE 18-19). Borrowing Frank Kermode's analogy of a ticking clock, Velleman suggests that stories are made sense of "by deploying some episodes to set off an emotional tick to which subsequent episodes can provide the answering tock" (NE 20). But it is important to realize that the *tick* and the *tock* are not just to points on a graph, that is to say they should not be understood in structural terms; on the contrary, they are dynamic

variables in the way they are embedded in the experiential temporality of emotion. Emotions have to run their course for the story to feel complete: “the story begins with the circumstances that initiate some affect, or sequence of affects, and it ends when that emotional sequence is in some way brought to a close” (NE 14). Thus, “having passed through the emotional ups and downs of the story, as one event succeeded another, the audience comes to rest in a stable attitude about the series of events in their entirety” (NE 19).

Patrik Colm Hogan offers a somewhat more complex framework of the affective logic of narratives, but the idea at its core is compatible with the insights of both Velleman and Sternberg. It shares with Velleman the belief that narrative shapes are affected by emotions, and emotions unfold and play out dynamically, and with Sternberg the interest in the continual sampling and reevaluation of emotional states and situations. Hogan presents two theories of emotions, one based on appraisal, another on perception. This appraisal theory attempts to chart the dynamics of human emotions in connection to desire and goal-oriented thinking. “Appraisal is [the] process of evaluating the ways in which a particular, interpreted situation affects one’s ability to achieve one’s goals. Broadly speaking, we may say that positive emotions reflect situations that make goal achievement more likely while negative emotions reflect situations that make goal achievement less likely. Particular positive and negative emotions reflect particular configurations of goals and facilitations or inhibitions of the achievement of those goals. For example, jealousy arises when attachment goals are threatened by a rival.” (AN 44). This model of emotions presupposes our utter sensitivity to the passage of time. We subdivide time into chunks, which form hierarchically ordered units (from smaller to larger) of incidents, events, episodes, and stories. Each occurrence marks a deviation from normalcy, thus prompting the reader to yearn for a return to normalcy, the fulfilment of which would complete an emotional cadence. Again, as in Velleman, the emotional profile of deviating from and returning to normalcy is not static but dynamic and experiential. He writes that “One important aspect of emotional response is that our experience of emotion does not operate on an absolute scale. It is part of a function of the gradient of change from one moment to the next. To some extent, this is a matter of our prior mood” (AN 33).

In contrast to the appraisal theory, the perceptual theory is based on the observation that “we respond to certain perceptual experiences very quickly,” (AN 45) such as noticing that something is scary, unexpected, or arousing, before we would have had time to appraise its effects on our long-term goals. It is a theory based on reaction and it is not, as Hogan writes, immediately obvious how the two dovetail. Perhaps both of them are right, and both types of emotional response are evoked under different circumstances. What I find interesting is that there seem to be correspondences between the appraisal and perception theory of human emotions and Meir Sternberg’s identification of several narrative interests. Thus, the element of surprise correlates with the perceptual view, and the act of balancing between curiosity and suspense with the appraisal model of emotions. First, we react to an

event, which is then followed by our trying to incorporate it into our picture of reality and adjust our expectations.

By giving this brief overview of theories of narrative emotions, I have been preparing to justify my contention that the ending of the story of James and Mr. Ramsay does not work properly. Even though the story does contain the *tick* and *tock* of the initiating and resolving incidents, James's desire to go to the lighthouse and James's resentment of his father, coupled with the scene of arrival at the lighthouse and the moment of reconciliation with the father, the emotional landscape that would allow the reader to get from point A to point B is missing. There are no reversals, no ups and downs that connect these events, no detectable retardatory structure. The *tick* and the *tock* are nothing but formal markers without any meaningful phenomenological content. This feature does not easily fit in with the character of the rest of the writing. On the contrary, Woolf's novel is everywhere else extremely finely attuned to the ebb and flow of human emotion. In fact, the masterful way in which the writing captures the recurrent rhythms of emotions and perceptions is one of its stylistic innovations, together with the technique of the floating focus, whereby one focalizing consciousness seamlessly shifts into another. Both of these contribute to making this book a heady and sometimes disorienting reading experience.

The two important psychological observations that the narrative makes is, firstly, that our feelings about things constantly change: a momentary snapshot of our feelings does not reflect our overall attitude about a subject, and, secondly, that timing is crucial to making a meaningful connection with another human being. We can see this, for example, in the dinner scene in the first part of the novel. William Bankes, who has an old crush on Mrs. Ramsay, is turned off by her trivial conversation during dinner and feels a sudden distaste for her. "Yes, he thought, it is terrible waste of time. . . . Yet, he thought, she is one of my oldest friends. . . . Yet now at this moment her presence meant absolutely nothing to him" (TTL 97). However, a little bit later, when a perfectly cooked *boeuf en daube* is served, Mr. Bankes declares it a triumph. "How did she manage these things in the depth of the country? He asked her. She was a wonderful woman. All his love, all his reverence had returned"(TTL 109). In another scene in part three, Mr. Ramsay approaches Lily Briscoe as she is trying to paint. "Look at him, he seemed to be saying, look at me; and indeed, all the time he was feeling, Think of me, think of me" (TTL 166). Lily understands that he wants sympathy but bristles at the thought that it is expected of her, as a woman, to provide men with a shoulder to cry on. "His immense self-pity, his demand for sympathy poured and spread itself in pools at her feet, and all she did, miserable sinner that she was, was to draw her skirts a little closer round her ankles, lest she should get wet" (TTL 167). When the feeling of sympathy does spontaneously come unbidden, it does so at a "completely inappropriate moment . . . her feeling had come too late; there it was ready; but he no longer needed it" (TTL 168-9).

These episodes, together with others, reflect a recurring conflict that the novel

explores—one between sensitivity to feeling and responsiveness, on the one hand, and a somewhat insensitive (or "barren," as it is labeled in the novel) tendency toward scientific, rational thinking, on the other. The scientific mind is often associated with the male characters, such as Mr. Ramsay and Charles Tansley, his student, especially the latter's "acid way of peeling the flesh and blood off everything" (TTL 12). They both say disagreeable things in the name of truth, such as the wind "blowing from the worst possible direction for landing at the Lighthouse" (TTL 9). James, who wants to go to the lighthouse, hates his father not only for saying that the weather will not be fine in response to Mrs. Ramsay's assurance that it will be fine, but for the way he says it, "grinning sarcastically, not only with the pleasure of disillusioning his son and casting ridicule upon his wife . . . but also with some secret conceit at his own accuracy of judgment" (TTL 8). In his turn, Mr. Ramsay hates his wife for saying that it might be fine tomorrow. "The extraordinary irrationality of her remark, the folly of women's minds enraged him. . . . Not with the barometer falling and the wind due west" (TTL 37).

Scientific thinking with its long-term goal-making thematizes explicitly the foregrounded contrast between the linear temporality of the male, quest-like and abstract, and the convoluted temporality of the woman, attuned to the natural rhythms and flow of human emotion and grounded in concrete situations. Mr. Ramsay has his own metaphoric lighthouse that shines ahead but cannot be reached. Excusing himself, because he has to feed eight children, he is nonetheless dissatisfied with his life's achievement because "he had not done the thing he might have done" (TTL 51). Even though he had a "splendid mind," yet "if thought" was "like alphabet . . . arranged in twenty-six letters all in order . . . he reached Q . . . Z is only reached once by one man in a generation. Still if he could reach R it would be something" (TTL 39). His friend and colleague, William Bankes, says that "Ramsay is one of those men who do their best work before they are forty" (TTL 28), while Mr. Ramsay himself imagines that people consider him a failure and "that R was beyond him" (TTL 39). His wife, in her turn, wonders what she has done with her life. But her achievements cannot be arranged in an alphabet: they lie in the sphere of human interactions. She has a special talent of making people feel special and has mastered the art of bringing them together in a harmonious way on social occasions. Thus as she enters the dining room, she sees that "nothing seemed to have merged. They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and creating rested on her" (TTL 91). Similarly, in an earlier scene, she builds up her husband's ego by her carefully-chosen, soothing words, and while he, "filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied" feels "restored" and "renewed," she is sucked dry of energy and is described as "fold[ing] herself together [in exhaustion], one petal closed in another" (TTL 44).

Yet there is the story of Lily, pursuing her own quest, which is fulfilled, I would like to argue, in an act of real, not sham closure. Lily's subplot has "content," as it were: there is continuity, gradual development, and retardation, which together amount to a sense of fullness, as opposed to the emptiness of the father-and-son plot. Her moments of doubt and

dejection are interspersed with her moments of inspiration; thinking and planning are succeeded by the episodes of painting and experimentation. There is an inexorable progression in her feeling her way toward a perfect composition, from a lilac triangle, containing James and Mrs. Ramsay, which would balance light, shadows, and masses, to her doubts about foreground and background, to her decision where to put the trees, and, finally, to her epiphany about drawing the finishing line. Emotionally, Lily's journey has high and low points, building up to the climactic and moving scene of her being swept up by the compelling force of painting, "this formidable ancient enemy of hers—this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention" (TTL 172-173). But she has not won yet: her pursuit of completing the painting encounters a major reversal, when she loses her earlier feeling of certainty about her compositional arrangement and begins to feel desperation instead. It is only when she makes herself calm down and allows herself to inhabit the mood of quiet expectancy that the moment of inspiration and fulfillment comes to her.

The novel's sensitivity and adherence to the affective rhythms of emplotment, which the story of Lily's painting convincingly demonstrates, lead me to believe that the narrative of the lighthouse subplot is not meant to elicit an empathetic response. What then? I suggest that instead of subverting or questioning the very possibility of closure, as is common in modern and postmodern literature, the text makes the closure conspicuously unnatural by imposing it externally and by fiat. I propose to read the deferral of closure through Raoul Eshelman's theory of performatism. Eshelman bases his concept of performatism on GA's theory of the sign. He uses his analysis to explain new and salient characteristics of post-postmodern literature and art. But I believe it is applicable to works created in other periods as well, especially those that feature central moments of epiphany that shape meaning. What makes a work performatist is, among other things, a forced closure, which is imposed by the device of the double frame. "Performatist works are set up in such a way that the reader or viewer at first has no choice but to opt for a single, compulsory solution raised within the work at hand" (P 2). "On the one hand, you're practically forced to identify with something implausible within the frame—to *believe* in spite of yourself—but on the other, you still *feel* the coercive force causing this identification to take place"(P 3). Coercion, which we nonetheless recognize, is created when the outer frame locks the inner frame. The inner frame could, for example, be at the level of the story, and the outer frame at the level of the narrator, but they could also be at different story levels.

In this case, the inner frame is drawn around Mr. Ramsay and his children, who are arriving at the lighthouse. The outer frame is that of Lily Briscoe and her story of struggling to finish her painting. Precisely **at** the moment the Ramsays reach the other side of the bay, Lily Briscoe experiences a flash of intuition, which tells her how to complete her painting. Her epiphanic vision is what imposes the closure on the story, with the frame around her painting becoming the literal outer frame of the journey to the lighthouse. Lily's realization that the painting is finished completes, in a peremptory fashion, the story within the inner

frame. Eshelman's model validates our intuition about the artificiality of this narrative closure but it also illuminates the meaning and function of epiphany from the perspective of GA's originary scene, as I will proceed to demonstrate.

The term *epiphany* in its secular, aesthetic sense was introduced into the critical discourse by Joyce in his earlier version of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Stephen Hero*. Joyce carries over the discussion of epiphany from *Stephen Hero* to his *Portrait*, but does not use the term itself in the later novel. The idea, however, does not undergo significant transformations. I will therefore use both texts interchangeably. The protagonist of *Stephen Hero* says that "by epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation" of a certain truth (DOE). While in the original religious epiphany, the wise men perceive the truth of Jesus's divinity, Joyce is, instead, interested in the truth of beauty, which, when perceived and appreciated, has a special effect, according to him: it arrests the mind, producing the experience of stasis. Unlike "desire [, which] urges us to possess," inciting in the audience "kinesthetic" emotions, the aesthetic moment, in agreement with Kant's postulate, is disinterested, and the emotions it arouses are static (PA 204-205). The moment of beauty, as the moment of the revelation of truth, is punctual. It arrests movement and condenses fleeting reality into a freeze-frame.

It seems to me that Woolf understands moments of revelation very similarly to the way Joyce conceptualizes epiphanies. As Lily resumes her painting, she experiences the stasis of beauty through having "exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting" (TTL 173). Significantly, Lily's moment of clarity about her painting echoes another, earlier moment of epiphany, which she recalls as an episode that happened ten years ago to herself, Mrs. Ramsay, and Charles Tansley. The trio was spending time on the beach, with Mrs. Ramsay's writing letters and, at the same time, observing Lily and Charles throwing stones into the water. Suddenly, this recollected scene finds resonance in Lily's thoughts as she reflects on the way a single moment can arrest the flow of time, stabilizing the experience of life, which is otherwise ineffable and impossible to capture. "What is the meaning of life? . . . The great revelation had never come. . . . Instead, there were little daily miracles, illuminations. . . . Herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying 'Life stand still here'; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent" (TTL 175-6). Lily clearly sees that this memory owes its existence to Mrs. Ramsay. After all these years, Lily is now in the position to appreciate the latter's special talent and mission in life: bringing people together, "merging and flowing and creating," (TTL 91) and finally making something permanent, palpable, and meaningful of the fleeting moments in time. This seizing of the ephemeral instances of now and bringing out their essence is what is at the heart of the painterly nature of epiphanies. This is what the painter experiences in her moment of vision—the feeling that she can see time standing still. In a similarly charged episode, Lily and William Bankes are observing Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay observing their children. "So that is marriage, Lily thought, a man and a woman looking at a girl throwing a ball. . . . And suddenly the

meaning which, for no reason at all . . . descends on people, making them symbolical, making them representative, came upon them, and made them . . . the symbols of marriage, husband and wife. Then, after an instant, the symbolical outline . . . sank down again, and they became . . . Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay watching the children throwing catches" (TTL 80).

Whenever these significant, time-arresting episodes happen in the novel, they are shared by several participants in various configurations of joint attention. Vera Tobin in her article on *To the Lighthouse* considers moments of joint attention to be a central feature of the novel. In continuing the modernist project, according to Tobin, Virginia Woolf questions the nature of consciousness and representation. "What happens when authors are no longer certain that perceptions can truly be communicated or shared" (JA 45)? The answer that the novel provides is ambiguous. On the one hand, joint attention can engineer moments of connection between characters who do not always see eye to eye. Thus Mrs. Ramsay, who is convinced that Mr. Carmichael dislikes and avoids her, shares an aesthetic moment with him inadvertently when they both glance at the same fruit dish: "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" (TTL 105-106). Similarly, in the last scene with Mrs. Ramsay, we see her and Mr. Ramsay sharing a joint look at the lighthouse.

Getting up, she stood at the window with the reddish-brown stocking in her hands, partly to turn away from him, partly because she remembered how beautiful it often is—the sea at night. But she knew that he had turned his head as she turned; he was watching her. She knew that he was thinking, You are more beautiful than ever. And she felt herself very beautiful. . . . Then, knowing that he was watching her, instead of saying anything she turned, holding her stocking, and looked at him. And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him. He could not deny it. And smiling she looked out of the window and said (thinking to herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness) (TTL 134).

On the other hand, Tobin's point that these moments of connection are fleeting, inconclusive, and deceptive is well-taken. After all, Mr. Carmichael's "way of looking [at the bowl] is different from [Mrs. Ramsay's]," and even intense momentary feelings of rapport and love are powerless to bridge misunderstandings and accumulated resentments between the spouses. Woolf's depiction of such scenes of misfired connections is of a piece with her general interest in "the desperate and mostly doomed attempt to understand and connect to the mind of others" as part of literary modernism's suspicion that "true mutual understanding can never be achieved" (JA 52). Even though I agree with Tobin's analysis, I believe that, in addition to exploring the modernist skepticism about representation of consciousness and intersubjective understanding, aesthetic (and often epiphanic) scenes of joint attention are instances of the reenactment of the originary scene.

What distinguishes the aesthetic moment from other circumstances of the emission of the sign is the subject's awareness of the paradoxical oscillatory experience between the contemplation of the sign and its imaginary referent. The originary pleasure derives from the relief the participants on the imaginary scene experience when they realize that the impending violence of competing for the possession for a real object is successfully deferred. The contemplation of the aesthetic form captures the doubleness of the moment of formal closure, when the sign is both conventional and motivated or "no longer an act of ethical solidarity and not yet a mere instrument, but independently evokes its referent in the imagination, no longer as material object but as sacred being on the spectator's scene of representation," as Eric Gans writes in *The Scenic Imagination* (SI 84). The main difference between a regular and aesthetic use of the sign lies in the retention of the memory of the originary event in the latter case, when the sign still feels freshly emitted, still reminiscent of deferred violence. "What assures the affective link between the arbitrary sign and the experience of sacred interdiction," Gans continues, "is the possibility of imaginarily, that is esthetically, evoking the scene by means of the sign. The esthetic moment is, so to speak, the becoming-portable of the sign" (SI 84). In *A New Way of Thinking*, Gans continues this line of argument, pointing out that in art, "´signs´ or representations cannot be divorced from the imaginary beings they generate in us" (NWT 201). An aesthetic emission of the sign is fascinated by the very act of the production of transcendence from immanence, verticality from horizontality, and focuses therefore on the newly emerged formal properties of the sign that bespeak its absolute arbitrariness, keeping apart and together within its attention span sign-as-the-form and sign-as-the-sacred. "What we call art," Gans writes, "is the deliberate cultivation of [the] generative act. The artwork obliges us to experience over time an oscillation between perception of the representation and its meaningful interpretation that models the genesis of the originary sign" (NWT 205).

In light of this analysis of art, the choice of Lily Briscoe's final epiphany as a representative model of the aesthetic moment feels especially appropriate. In her artistic process, Lily has been searching for balances and correspondences between her internal impressions of the external world and the representational means with which they could be captured. In her moment of distress over the progress of her painting, Lily despairs that "For whatever reason she could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture; which was necessary" (TTL 209). This is a fitting illustration of the generative act on, at least, two levels: firstly, the fact that Lily is an abstract painter, and so the painting that will be produced would be arbitrary on a literal level, as it were, constituting certainly a more arbitrary sign of what she wants to express than a figurative painting would have been; secondly, the fact that she is not even painting Mr. Ramsay on a boat—she is painting Mrs. Ramsay reading a book to James as this scene imprinted itself on her memory ten years ago. Yet the event of Mrs. Ramsay's boat touching land generates the mysteriously elusive moment of formal closure, the closure of her painting and the closure of the narrative. The reader is none the wiser as to what clicked in Lily's mind and allowed her to make sense of the connection between the arrival at the lighthouse and knowing

where to put the finishing line in her painting of Mrs. Ramsay or what, in Eshelman's terms, produced the *lock* or a *fit* between the outer frame of Lily's story and the inner frame of Mr. Ramsay's story, yet the narrative of Lily's creation of an art work does feel complete on an emotional level. In other words, the outer layer of the story still follows the conventional laws of narrative closure, but, by acting performatively, it reveals the inner workings of the sign, which receives its formal closure by the fiat of the originary community's consensus.

As Gans points out, Kant was one of the first thinkers who attempted to analyze the obscure and arbitrary nature of aesthetics in his *Critique of Judgment*. Judgment in Kant is precisely the faculty that is responsible for adjudicating correspondences. Aesthetic judgment or the judgment of taste is grounded in the intuition of a "subjective harmony of the imagination with the understanding without an objective harmony—where the presentation is referred to a determinate concept of an object" (CJ 92). Judgment without an underlying concept means that we do not (strangely enough, perhaps) judge objects based on symmetries or proportions, such as the golden mean, etc., but judge them directly: "a judgment of taste . . . is pure, it connects liking or disliking directly with the mere contemplation of the object" (CJ 92). This is why aesthetic judgment of taste is both universal(shared by all, universally communicable) and subjective (not based on objectively defined concepts). This claim of universal subjectivity makes Kant's analysis of the beautiful deeply insightful from the anthropological perspective because, as Gans rightly points out, the only way to bring together the notions of subjectivity and universality is through their origin in the consensus of the emergent human community.

By glossing Kant's analysis of taste, Gans brings up the interesting idea of *thisness*. Indeed, what does it mean to "grasp an object [by intuiting] unity and purpose 'without a concept'" (NWT 202)? Regular judgment uses concepts to interpret sense data. On seeing a horse, we identify it as a horse using the concept of "horseness" that we have formed. "The esthetic object . . . is one that shares with the members of 'natural kinds' the wholeness that we associate with living species, yet unlike these, it cannot simply be named by a species concept. In experiencing the particular living unity of *this horse* I do more than judge it a good example of horseness; I intuit it as a purposeful individual being, existing for itself and not merely in order to exemplify its species" (NWT 202). In other words, non-aesthetic judgment sees categories, while aesthetic judgment sees individualities.

This analysis dovetails nicely with the rest of the discussion about beauty and epiphanic vision in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* and *Stephen Hero*. The protagonist of both novels invokes Aquinas' idea of beauty, according to which the mind grasps beauty in three stages: as wholeness (or integrity), symmetry (or harmony), and finally, radiance (or clarity). This observation captures something that is central to epiphany. As we perceive a beautiful object, we experience a subtle shift of perspective, whereby ordinary vision becomes special, extraordinary vision: it makes the thing on which it focuses appear symbolic, significant, or larger than life in our imagination. Under its searching light, the object

becomes *epiphanized*, according to *Stephen Hero*'s protagonist. But the next moment, the privileged kind of vision changes back to ordinary vision and the object, once again, becomes ordinary. Stephen says that *claritas* comes from the Aquinian notion of *quidditas*, the *whatness* of an object. It has been remarked, however, that the notion Joyce really needs is that of *haecceity* or *thisness*, which comes from Duns Scotus (see, for example, Kearney (EJ)). It is our recognition of the haecceity of the thing that makes it radiant. As Stephen explains to his friend Lynch in the *Portrait*: "The instance wherein the supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure" (PA 213). To a reader not coming from the perspective of Generative Anthropology, the idea of some special, arresting vision that can produce an exalted experience of radiant thisness may appear baffling, metaphoric, or even mystical. How can thisness be experienced? How can it create a spiritual manifestation of recognition? What can be recognizable about *this* particular object, the object that I have not encountered before? To answer this question, I will look closer at the three steps of aesthetic apprehension and compare them to Charles Peirce's fundamental categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness.

This is how Stephen in *Stephen Hero* explains these three steps to his friend Cranly.

> -You know what Aquinas says: The three things requisite for beauty are, integrity, a wholeness, symmetry and radiance. . . . Consider the performance of your own mind when confronted with any object, hypothetically beautiful. Your mind to apprehend that object divides the entire universe into two parts, the object, and the void which is not the object. To apprehend it you must lift it away from everything else: and then you perceive that it is one integral thing, that is *a* thing. You recognise its integrity. . . . That is the first quality of beauty: it is declared in a simple sudden synthesis of the faculty which apprehends.
>
> . . .
>
> -What then? Analysis then. The mind considers the object in whole and in part, in relation to itself and to other objects, examines the balance of its parts, contemplates the form of the object, traverses every cranny of the structure. So the mind receives the impression of the symmetry of the object. The mind recognises that the object is in the strict sense of the word, a *thing,* a definitely constituted entity.
>
> . . .
>
> Now for the third quality. For a long time I couldn't make out what Aquinas meant. He uses a figurative word (a very unusual thing for him) but I have solved it. *Claritas is quidditas.* After the analysis which discovers the second quality the mind makes the only logically possible synthesis and discovers the third quality. This is the moment which I

> call epiphany. First we recognise that the object is *one* integral thing, then we recognise that it is an organised composite structure, a *thing* in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognise that it is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany (DOE).

Whenever three ways of cognizing an object are brought up, they trigger an association with the Peircean phenomenological categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness. Peirce sees these categories as the three fundamental components of thought that apply to our perceptual apparatus, that is to say, we perceive the world in terms of either firstness, or secondness, or thirdness. There is nothing above thirdness, only recursive agglomerations of further thirdnesses.

Firstness is a "positive internal character of the subject itself" or the "mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else." It is also a "quality of feeling." Examples of firstness could be the quality of redness or hardness in themselves, unrelated to any object to which they could be attached (PF).

Secondness is a "brute action of one subject or substance on another" or a "mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second." It is the idea of effort prescinded from the idea of purpose . . . the experience of effort cannot exist without the experience of resistance. Effort is only effort by virtue of its being opposed; and no third element enters" (PS).

Finally, there is thirdness, which is an "influence of one subject on another relatively to a third" or a "mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other." While firstness has to do with feelings, secondness with experience, thirdness relates to thinking. Whenever we speak of thirdness or a triadic relationship, Peirce explains, "you will always find a mental element in it." This is another way of saying, of course, that thirdness is the category of representation. Linguistic signs, symbolic systems, mathematical relations, and lawful regularities in sciences are all manifestations of thirdness (PT).

In linguistics, the three categories have been connected to the three kinds of sign—iconic (standing for the thing itself), indexical (standing for something else), and symbolic (mediating between two things). It is only with the emergence of the symbolic that language begins, although symbols may be used to represent icons and indices. While animals understand indexical connections, according to the received view, they cannot use signs as conventions—for this you need the symbol. And indeed, you need a third term to create an arbitrary connection between two others. However, when we put the three stages of apprehension side-by-side with the three phenomenological categories, we discover that

they do not match up. The first step, one of apprehending integrity, which divides the universe into two parts, the object and its background, takes us directly into secondness, which is not surprising since pure firstness must be pre-cognitive. Consequently, the synthesizing second step is only possible on the level of thirdness since in order to evaluate symmetry (or harmony), we need to consider the object's relational aspects. But what then do we do with the third step of radiance? After all, according to Peirce, there is nothing above thirdness. Are Aquinas and Joyce mistaken about this division or is there something like fourthness? On the contrary, I would like to suggest that they display a sound anthropological intuition.

Significantly also, Eric Gans expressed doubt about the Peircean schema, writing "what I find lacking in the Peircean . . . notion of the sign is precisely the absence of a passage through the absolute difference of the sacred/significant" (NWT 205). We need another category to explain "the *frisson* that accompanies our encounter with a successful artwork" (NWT 205)—the state of oscillation. I propose that we call the "fourthness" of the epiphanic seeing by the name of "mediated firstness." What we recognize as an epiphany is the prelinguistic and pre-cognitive moment of the object's still being an appetitive object of mimetic contention before the origin of language. What is radiantly flickering at the heart of the ecstatic experience of epiphany is the oscillation between two images: those of the object as firstness, to which we no longer have access, and the object as sign representing or mediating this original lost firstness. Epiphanies are thus paradigmatic aesthetic moments, which produce a re-enactment of the originary scene. But they also focus our attention on the belatedness of the sign, and, at the same time, promise that its lost essence can be recovered through their performance of mediated firstness. Once we understand something in its symbolic, epiphanic, larger-than-life sense, for example, this group of people not just as two parents watching their children play, but as the symbolic incarnation of family itself, we have produced an alignment of the double frame, which locks meaning into place. What is interesting about performatist mechanisms, described by Eshelman, is that they make these reenactments self-consciously explicit. The reason we accept a lock or fit between the inner and outer frame is because the minimal inner frame "[consists] of an intuitively perceived unity of sign and thing," which we take for granted (P 5). This is only possible, as Eshelman writes, because the minimally possible inner frame is grounded in the originary scene, which creates an illusion of a natural link between the thing and the sign. Even as meaning in a performatist work (and I consider epiphanies performatist) seems to be imposed from above by the "arbitrary or dogmatic quality" of the outer frame, it is made possible from below by the inner frame, which secures the connection between the sign and the referent: "the inner frame of the sign," he writes, "makes possible the outer frame of the human" (P 5). Thus to return to Lily's epiphany, the firstness that it makes visible is Mrs. Ramsay's luminous quality of turning life into art, but it can only be appreciated retrospectively, ten years after Mrs. Ramsay's death.

Mediated firstness goes hand-in-hand with the experience of belatedness and retrospective

nature of narratives because the originary scene incorporates the originary belatedness and retrospection. In order to avoid violence threatened by the contesting desires and abandon their appropriative gestures, the participants must somehow pre-understand the danger of the center in its constraining power to defer appetites (NWT 32). While the participants are still drawn to the center by the memory of the sacred's appetitive attractiveness, the sacred center, in an opposing motion, pushes back. Elsewhere I have analyzed these counter forces as the originary doubleness of narrative (NJ). I suggest that the figures of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay can be seen as metaphors of this doubleness. While Mr. Ramsay's quest to "reach R" represents the forward movement of desire, Mrs. Ramsay, in her defensive stance, is backward-oriented, her cautionary wisdom a repository of scary scenarios. Despite Mr. Ramsay's lack of emotional self-sufficiency and his dependence on Mrs. Ramsay for support and encouragement, he is the optimistic partner in this union, while Mrs. Ramsay, despite her nurturing strength, is the one who sees life as "terrible and hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you gave it a chance" (TTL 66). In connecting real Mr. Ramsay and imaginary Mrs. Ramsey with a line in the center, Lily's moment of epiphany seems to me to function as a meta-narrative performatist commentary on the emergence of language and the origin of narrative.

There is something exemplary in the epiphanic moments in *To the Lighthouse* in their self-consciousness scenicity of being aesthetic experiences par excellence, re-enacting the originary event as event, not as a memory, on the scene of representation, which engages the joint attention of the participants. Joint attention is the phenomenon made possible by the originary moment and making possible, in its turn, the originary scene's later re-enactments. In addition to the examples already given, here are two more important examples. The scene when Lily is struck by the Ramsays appearing as a paradigmatic model of the family has a double configuration of joint attention: as Lily and William are observing the Ramsays, the couple is jointly observing their children. Similarly, in the last scene, Lily is observing the boat together with normally aloof Mr. Carmichael. But in this instance, they are sharing a moment of intimacy. "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. . . . They had not needed to speak. They had been thinking the same things and he had answered her without her asking him anything. He stood there spreading his hands over all the weakness and suffering of mankind; she thought he was surveying, tolerantly, compassionately, their final destiny" (TTL 225).

One could object that the scene of Lily's epiphany when she understands that Mrs. Ramsay made life stand still takes place entirely in Lily's imagination and is thus not an actual reenactment of the originary scene, but I would suggest that this scene is, in some sense, the most interesting example. By seeing in front of her inner eye Mrs. Ramsay observing herself and Charles Tansley throwing stones in the water, she is watching her earlier self jointly with Mrs. Ramsay, seeing herself through Mrs. Ramsay's eyes. This moment is vertiginous, circular, evocative, and recognizable. My final suggestion is that a moment like

this compresses the paradigm of narrative self-consciousness. It is vertiginous because it makes visible the operation of the mimetic paradox. It is circular because it encodes the prospective and retrospective orientation of narratives. It is evocative because it stresses the belatedness of representation. And it is recognizable because it expresses what Barthes calls the *deja-lu* (already read) quality of intertextuality. Lily seeing herself inside the inner frame is not just a metaphor but an actual performance of narrative closure, suggesting that closure involves both transcendence and self-referentiality.

Works Cited

Eshelman, Raoul. *Performatism or the End of Postmodernism*. Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group Publishers, 2008. Print.

Gans, Eric. *A New Way of Thinking*. Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group Publishers, 2011. Print.

—. *The Scenic Imagination*. Stanford, California: The Stanford University Press, 2008. Print.

"James Joyce: Definition of Epiphany." http://theliterarylink.com/joyce.html". 2 Oct 2014. Web.

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Wordsworth Classics, 1992. Print.

Hogan, Patrick Holm. *Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories*. University of Nebraska Press, 2011. Print.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Tr. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987. Print.

Kearney, Richard. "Epiphanies in Joyce." *Global Ireland: Irish Literatures for the New Millenium*. Ed. Ondřej Pilný and Clare Wallace. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005.https://www2.bc.edu/~kearneyr/pdf_articles/pl86273.pdf . 18 Oct 2014. Print/Web.

Ludwigs, Marina. "What Propels Narratives Forward? Narrative as Janus." *Anthropoetics* 19.2 (Spring 2014). Web.

"Peirce: Firstness." " www.commens.org/dictionary/term/firstness" . 2 Oct 2014. Web.

"Peirce: Secondness." " www.commens.org/dictionary/term/secondness" . 2 Oct 2014. Web.

"Peirce: Thirdness." " www.commens.org/dictionary/term/thirdness" . 2 Oct 2014. Web.

Pyrhönen, Heta. "Retardatory Devices." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Ed.

David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. 499-500. Print.

Sternberg, Meir. *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1978. Print.

Tobin, Vera. "Joint Attention, *To the Lighthouse*, and Modernist Representations of Intersubjectivity." *Textual Choices in Discourse: A View from Cognitive Linguistics*. Ed. Barbara Dancygier, Jose Sanders, and Lieven Vandelanotte. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012. 45-62. Print.

Velleman, David J. "Narrative Explanations." *Philosophical Review* 112.1 (Jan, 2003): 1-25. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse*. Penguin Modern Classics, 2000.

Abbreviations

Affective Narratology—AN

A New Way of Thinking—NWT

Critique of Judgment—CJ

Epiphanies in Joyce—EJ

Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction—EM

James Joyce: Definition of Epiphany—DOE

Joint Attention, To the Lighthouse, and Modernist Representations of Intersubjectivity—JA

Narrative Explanation—NE

Peirce: Firstness—PF

Peirce: Secondness—PS

Peirce: Thirdness—PT

Performatism or the End of Postmodernism—P

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man—PA

Retardatory Devices—RD

The Scenic Imagination—SI

To the Lighthouse—TTL

What propels narratives forward? Narrative as Janus—NJ