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"In the Midst of Chaos There Was Shape": Formalist Aesthetics and Ekphrasis in *To the Lighthouse*

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Abstract
Virginia Woolf's autobiographical novel *To the Lighthouse* explicitly connects itself with Bloomsbury formalist aesthetics, with a special acknowledgement of Roger Fry's formalist influence. This essay focuses on the influence of Fry's formalist principles on *To the Lighthouse*, but additionally proposes a reorientation of reading that argues for Woolf's modifications of formalism, which is concretized as the reconciliation of formalism and everyday life, where everyday life is specified as Woolf's notion of "moments of being." The essay contends that such a reconciliation is facilitated by representation and thus adopts James Heffernan's theory of ekphrasis to analyse Lily Briscoe's painting. Drawing on Heffernan's definitions of ekphrasis, this essay regards the formalist elements in Lily's picture as representational but not pictorial, whereas the object represented in Lily's picture – in the text, Mrs. Ramsay – is of second-degree representationality, which spells out as intimacy and unity in terms of human relations. With intimacy and unity as core values in her mind, Lily eventually manages to represent Mrs. Ramsay's being until "there she sat."

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, formalist art, Roger Fry, ekphrasis, moments of being, everyday life

In her highly aesthetic fiction and self-reflexive Künstlerroman *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) records the Ramsay family's stay on the Isle of Skye. Centring on the Ramsays' voyage to the lighthouse, the text in its triadic structure describes the vicissitudes of

incidents, mingled with Lily Briscoe's completion of her painting. Woolf's design of the character Lily and her painting has drawn critical readings, and Lily's explanation of her painting serves as an "implicit aesthetic manifesto" of the novel (Goldman 61). Suzanne Bellamy regards *To the Lighthouse* as "an exploration of the visual and its relation to text" and attributes this attempt at exploration to the painterly influence exerted by Woolf's painter sister and her artist friends in the Bloomsbury group (136). Critics have long recognized Bloomsbury formalist aesthetic influence on Lily's artistic vision. This essay interrogates Woolf's engagement with Roger Fry's formalist ideas. The engagement with formalism notwithstanding, I argue that Woolf has offered her alternative perspective to an incorporation of formalist aesthetics and represented everyday life (concretized as her "moments of being" in this essay). Formalism, known by its advocacy of forms in visual art and its aversion to mimesis of reality and familiarity of emotions, seems to oppose the idea of representation. This essay responds to the conflict by taking James Heffernan's definition of ekphrasis as the mediation between the two stances. There have been ekphrastic readings of *To the Lighthouse*: Kathryn Stelmach argues that Woolf created multiple ekphrastic suspensions in her text (305), and Estella Ciobanu contends that *Lighthouse* elicits the "*readerly reverse ekphrasis*" (35). This article, on the other hand, argues for a reconciliation of formalism and representation in *Lighthouse* enacted by the dynamic and active writerly ekphrasis in its modern sense.

Formalist Aesthetics, Woolf, and Ekphrasis

As core members of the Bloomsbury group, Woolf and her formalist brethren were in constant conversation about art creation, publications, and life. Woolf was thus exposed to Bloomsbury formalist art for long. In 1910, Woolf and her sister "scandalously masqueraded as nearly nude 'Gauguin girls'" at Fry's groundbreaking "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" exhibition in London (Goldman 12). The event was, as Woolf remarked, "of cataclysmic change" (Goldman 11). Bloomsbury formalism, however, lacked a constant and coherent set of values shared by all its members. Vanessa Bell's colourism, Clive Bell's "significant form" and Fry's new

formalism built up together its theoretical context. Bloomsbury formalist theory is thus encapsulated as "the 'aesthetic rapture' brought on by the 'combination of lines and colours'" (Goldman 15) and "the rejection of mimesis in favour of concentration on the play of abstract form" (Reed 20). *To the Lighthouse* is now widely acknowledged as a work embodying Bloomsbury formalism, and Lily Briscoe as a disciple of formalist aesthetics. Scholars regard the formal style that characterizes *Lighthouse* as post-impressionism, a word first coined by Fry. Although Fry only intended to designate a temporal relation to impressionism, the term post-impressionism has developed to name a movement that continued exploring colour and form, yet reacted against the naturalism of impressionism ("Post-Impressionism").

Woolf and Fry's friendship and colleagueship need no further demonstrations. After Fry's death in 1934, Woolf became his biographer. In a letter addressed to Woolf by Fry's sister Margery Fry (later published as the foreword to Fry's biography), the latter thanked Woolf for undertaking to portray Fry, after "one of those discussions upon the methods of arts which had illuminated Fry's long and happy friendship with you" (Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography* 1). *Lighthouse* was originally dedicated to Fry: in her letter to Fry, Woolf wrote, "You have kept me on the right path, so far as writing goes, more than anyone" to acknowledge Fry's influence on the text (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 2: 385).

A return to Clive Bell's "significant form" may have served as a starting point for Fry's theories, especially Fry's remarks on representation. As a formalist, Bell famously put forward the term "significant form" and valued pure forms as the pivot of a painting: "What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? . . . Only one answer seems possible – significant form. In each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions" (8). Similarly, in his commentary on Florentine art, Fry wrote that it was "upon form and form alone, that the great Florentine masters concentrated their efforts" and "finally we are forced to the belief that, in their pictures at least, form is the principal source of aesthetic enjoyment" (qtd. in Bullen 2). Both Bell and Fry emphasized the notion of anti-mimesis, as Fry wrote ironically, "For, I suppose, it must be admitted that if imitation

is the sole purpose of the graphic arts, it is surprising that the works of such arts are ever looked upon as more than curiosities, or ingenious toys, are ever taken seriously by grown-up people" (*Vision and Design* ch. 2).

The agreement on anti-mimesis notwithstanding, Bell and Fry's division of opinions on representation is notable. Bell maximized his "significant form" and completely shut representation out of his system: "To appreciate a work of art, we need bring nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation" (25). Fry disagreed with Bell on the way he treated representation: "This last view seemed to me always to go too far since any even the slightest suggestion, of the third dimension in a picture must be due to some element of representation" (*Vision and Design* ch. 25). And he also declared that, "[w]hatever Mr. Clive Bell may have said, I personally have never denied the existence of some amount of representation in all pictorial art. I have always admitted the purely representative nature of the presentment of the third dimension on the flat surface of a picture" clearly reinstates art's representative nature (Fry, "Mr. MacColl and Drawing" 84). In his writing, Fry listed what he called "emotional elements" (rhythm, mass, space, light and shade, colour, the inclination to the eye of a plane) and continued to stress how physical conditions necessitate the emotional elements: "Now it will be noticed that nearly all these emotional elements of design are connected with essential conditions of our physical existence . . . the graphic arts arouse emotions in us by playing upon what one may call the overtones of some of our primary physical needs" (Fry, V*ision and Design* ch. 2). Quite paradoxical to the formalist doctrines, the highlighted physical conditions bring up the reconsideration of the relationship between art and life, that the emotional elements should be combined with "the presentation of natural appearances, above all with the appearance of the human body" (Fry, *Vision and Design* ch. 2), and herein lies the indicated representational relation between form (emotional elements) and life (physical conditions).

Woolf also adopted her artistic views and preferences through her constant contact with Vanessa. In a letter, Woolf complimented Vanessa's paintings for having a significant form and "go[ing] on saying something of its own" (qtd. in Dowling 101). In her view, there appears first aesthetic

enjoyment aroused by sheer beauty of colours and shapes. "One should be a painter," Woolf wrote, in another letter to Vanessa: "As a writer, I feel the beauty, which is almost entirely colour, very subtle, very changeable, running over my pen, as if you poured a large jug of champagne over a hairpin" (*Letters* 5: 243). The affinity between painting and writing is pinned in the vivid simile. In another letter to Vanessa, Woolf set her sister's paintings aside her perception of ideal writing, that of "granite and rainbow" (Dowling 101). In the phrase "granite and rainbow," the syncretism of aesthetic emotions and natural elements can quickly be discerned, which resembles Fry's elaborations on emotional elements and physical conditions. Her compliment on Vanessa's paintings notwithstanding, Woolf felt dissatisfied to find out that some of them consisted of bare forms, as she once asked Vanessa this significant question: "Is morality to be found there?" (qtd. in Dowling 101). Dowling teased a firm conclusion out of this question: "art without life is not as exciting as art with life" (101).

Although Woolf's question seemingly opposes Fry and his formalism, it is worth noting that Woolf's "life" or "morality" and Fry's "life" are, to some extent, only homonyms; they defined the two notions quite differently. When Fry insisted on getting rid of the involvement of life in his art, he was referring to rigid symbolism or mistaken familiarity of emotions. Life for Woolf, however, often connoted her "moments of being." In her memoir "A Sketch of the Past" (1985), Woolf described "being" as follows:

> Yesterday for example, Tuesday the 18th of April, was [as] it happened a good day; above the average in "being". It was fine; I enjoyed writing these first pages; my head was relieved of the pressure of writing about Roger; I walked over Mount Misery and along the river; and save that the tide was out, the country, which I notice very closely always, was coloured and shaded as I like – there were the willows, I remember, all plumy and soft green and purple against the blue. I also read Chaucer with pleasure; and began a book – the memoirs of Madame de la Fayette – which interested me. (70)

The "moments of being" are however embedded in largely portioned moments of "non-being" – Woolf's private shorthand for time lived not attentively or consciously, as if being "embedded in a kind of nondescript

cotton wool" (Woolf, "Sketch" 70). In her childhood Woolf recalled many moments of non-being that made no dint upon her, yet apart from those moments "there was a sudden violent shock; something happened so violently that I have remembered it all my life" (71). These violent moments of exceptions, however, did not instantly unveil some truths; they only became wholeness when they were put into words after the first surprise. The wholeness signifies those "moments of being" and such wholeness "gives me . . . a great pleasure" (72). From Woolf's illustrations two elements of "moments of being" can be captured: the shock-receiving capacity and the search for wholeness through recollection. A "moment of being" is thus not one epiphanic revelation that immediately displays the truth or alters the course of things, but a moment when the shocking, violent events are clarified, integrated, and recorded, so that one is able to gain access to a whole, unified vision. By asking for morality in Vanessa's paintings, Woolf was seeking for "moments of being": the reduction of tone and colours to bare bones, according to Woolf, fails Vanessa's art, and the paintings need vitality. The question thus signifies Woolf's quest for a reconciliation of formalism and life, which necessitates a further discussion on representation as the mediation of such a reconciliation.

This essay takes its cues from Heffernan's theory of ekphrasis which deals with the issue of representation to argue for a reconciliation of formalism and life. The concept of ekphrasis (εκφρασις) originates from the Greek word *ekphrazein*, which was one of the stylistic techniques of panegyrical or epideictic oratory, advocated by the Greek New Sophists. It referred to "the elaborate 'delineation' . . . of people, places, buildings, works of art" (Curtius 69). The work of art adopted by the New Sophistic to exemplify ekphrasis was Homer's detailed depiction of Achilles' shield in his *Iliad* (1598). Ekphrasis was repurposed as a modern term for inter-art poetry criticism by Leo Spitzer. In his 1955 essay "The 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' or Content vs. Metagrammar," Spitzer reattributed John Keats' poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn' to the genre of ekphrasis – "the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art" (207). The description implies "une transposition d'art," "the reproduction through the medium of words of sensuously perceptible *objets d'art* (*ut pictura poesis*)" (Spitzer 208). By such reexamination Spitzer restricted the scope of ekphrasis which

underlined the transposition of art. Inspired by Spitzer's essay, Murray Krieger published his essay "Ekphrasis and the Still Movement of Poetry; or, *Laokoön* Revisited" in 1967, after which ekphrasis became a key term that largely drew critics' attention. On Krieger's essay, Heffernan built up his theory of ekphrasis. Though deeply indebted to Krieger, who gave ekphrasis, this moribund term, new life, Heffernan worried that Krieger "stretches ekphrasis to the breaking point" that the term no longer referred to literature and became a new name for formalism (298). With his intention to restore the content, Heffernan proposed the definition of ekphrasis in its modern sense as "the verbal representation of graphic representation" (299). Modern ekphrasis has been re-coined to identify the relationship between what is visual and what is verbal, and "by re-encoding as verbal what exists (or is claimed to exist) visually, modern ekphrasis also *remediates* . . . the visual" and "establishes what Roland Barthes calls 'the reality effect' (*l'effet du réel*)" (Ciobanu 34).

Heffernan's definition, now used as the "broadest current sense" of ekphrasis (Connolly 103), designates a literary mode and accentuates that central to ekphrasis is the very question of representation. In his analysis, Heffernan pinpointed two new specimens of ekphrasis, one being that ekphrasis focuses on the nature of representation. Heffernan distinguished ekphrasis from pictorialism (which represents natural objects and artifacts) and iconicity (which apes the shapes to help represent natural objects). Ekphrasis, on the other hand, explicitly represents the representation itself; in Heffernan's words, "[w]hat ekphrasis represents in words, therefore, must itself be representational" (300). It thus becomes necessary to clarify the notion of representation, considering the complexity of its possible definitions. The representation in "graphic representation" means the portrayal of persons or objects in the artistic medium: pictures, sculptures, art crafts, etc. Lily's painting in *Lighthouse*, which takes Mrs. Ramsay and James as models, exemplifies such representation. The representation in "verbal representation" indicates the depiction or the delineation of the graphic works by a speaker or narrator. In the text, the description of Lily's painting pertains to verbal representation. Heffernan stated that "ekphrasis explicitly represents representation itself" (300). The representationality per se is interpreted as connotations in this essay. Lily's painting is

ostensibly about Mrs. Ramsay; however, Mrs. Ramsay as the represented is representational: as part 2 and part 3 of this essay will illustrate, she signifies the core values of life and Lily's inspirations.

The other feature of Heffernan's view on ekphrasis is that it resists the idea of the "pregnant moment" – Wendy Steiner's term for the moment of pictorial stasis (Heffernan 301). On the contrary, Heffernan argued that ekphrasis should release a narrative impulse – it "reveals . . . this narrative response to pictorial stasis, this storytelling impulse that language by its very nature seems to release and stimulate" (301). As is underscored in part 3 of this essay, Lily does not complete her painting within a frozen instant in space; her painting is the combination of observation and recollection, and is finished in both temporal and spatial motion.

"But the Picture Is Not of Them": Shape and Intimacy

Lily Briscoe adopts a formalist approach in her painting. Instead of copying from life, she simplifies and abstracts. Lily thus contrasts sharply with Mr. Paunceforte, the realist artist invoked in the text. At the beginning of the novel, strolling along the seashore, Mrs. Ramsay admires the beauty of the view, which reminds her of the artists – Mr. Paunceforte and his followers – and their indistinguishable painterly attempts to represent the view: "Since Mr Paunceforte had been there, three years before, all the pictures were like that, she said, green and grey, with lemon-coloured sailing-boats, and pink women on the beach" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 14). These artists have reduced art to a paradigm without originality and aesthetic vision. Lily rejects such a paradigm; she has her own view growing in her. During her stroll with Mr. Bankes, Lily notices the bright colours of objects, yet refuses to see and portray them realistically: "Then beneath the colour there was the shape. She could see it all so clearly, so commandingly, when she looked: it was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing changed" (19). Lily can exfoliate the surface and see the shape beneath so clearly. Mentally constructing her world in shapes, she rejects being one of the artists who follows Mr. Paunceforte and instead chooses her formalist view.

Lily's abstraction, however, does not go as far as Mr. Ramsay's philosophy. When Lily asks Andrew what Mr. Ramsay's works are about, Andrew answers: "Subject and object and the nature of reality" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 23). The philosophy is so opaque that Lily has no notion of what it means, and Andrew lets her just "think of a kitchen table . . . when you're not there" (23). Mr. Ramsay's philosophy is intensely conceptual and does not represent anything; it has no bearing on life, as Lily charges against Mr. Ramsay's unworldliness: "he knows nothing about trifles" (24). His philosophy is without a form, or material foundation. Capable of abstraction, Lily nevertheless manages to remain "short-sighted"; she juxtaposes specific things with their abstract concepts exactly to the extent where the final products can stand on their own. One captivating detail is that the phantom table in Lily's imagination finally lodges in the fork of a pear tree, with its four legs in air, because she reaches the orchard and sees the pear trees (23). When Lily arrives at the orchard, she immediately combines the philosophical idea (in this case, the phantom table) with the reality (the fork of the pear tree); she finds the representation. Another example is that, when she praises Mr. Bankes, she thinks of his contribution to science, and "sections of potatoes rose before her eyes" (24). Concepts, in Lily's vision, find their representations.

One significant moment is when Mr. Bankes notices the triangular purple shape on Lily's canvas and asks her what she wishes to indicate by it. "It was Mrs. Ramsay reading to James," Lily answers (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 50). No one could tell the triangle for the human shape, but likeness is not what Lily attempts; she is practicing the anti-mimetic formalism where the evaluation standard reads that "a man's head is no more and no less important than a pumpkin" (Fry, *Vision and Design* ch. 4). Mr. Bankes's reaction then brings up the issue of representation. He is intrigued: "Mother and child then – objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty – might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 50). To Mr. Bankes, simplifying a beautiful woman into a shape is a reduction, which suggests that he as a male misrepresents aesthetics as desire. Lily's formalist approach, which reduces a human to a shape, deprives Mr. Bankes

of such desire. The differences between desire and aesthetics have been emphasized by Bell and Fry, since the two categories are widely confused:

> With the man-in-the-street "beautiful" is more often than not synonymous with "desirable"; the word does not necessarily connote any aesthetic reaction whatever, and I am tempted to believe that in the minds of many the sexual flavor of the word is stronger than the aesthetic. I have noticed a consistency in those to whom the most beautiful thing in the world is a beautiful woman, and the next most beautiful thing a picture of one. (Bell 15)

Mr. Bankes misrepresents beauty as an object of desire, if not sexual attraction. Lily's view differs from Mr. Bankes's; she does not regard beauty as the destination of art and contends that beauty has its flaws. It is so static that it cannot unleash life but rather freezes it: "beauty was not everything. Beauty had its penalty – it came too readily, came too completely. It stilled life – froze it" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 166). As a formalist painter, Lily problematizes seeing as vicarious possession and refuses to let her art serve desire. She further confirms the difference between her and Mr. Bankes: "But the picture is not of them, she said. *Or, not in his sense*. There were other senses too in which one might reverence them" (50, my emphasis).

Lily then goes on to illustrate how to work with formalist elements and make the painting a tribute. While the illustration interests Mr. Bankes, he then misrepresents Lily's formalist aesthetics as the familiarity of emotions. Lily's explanation reminds Mr. Bankes of his "largest picture in his drawing room . . . [which] was of the cherry trees in blossom on the banks of the Kennet. He had spent his honeymoon on the banks of the Kennet" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 50). All of Mr. Bankes's prejudices about the painting, however, "were on the other side" where he is quite proud that the painter has been valued at a higher price than what he had actually paid (50). His picture moreover has emotional worth: it is about his honeymoon with his late wife. Mr. Bankes's understanding of art is thus not ekphrastic; the picture's content – the natural correlative, represented in his words – is not representational. He simply misconstrues his emotions related to natural objects and his nostalgia for his lost wife as aesthetic feelings.

On the other hand, the irrelevant familiarity of emotions is not what Lily as a formalist pursues. She wishes to catch the nature of the objects, in this instance, Mrs. Ramsay. Before she starts her painting, Lily once leans her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knees and likens her to "an august shape; the shape of a dome" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 49). The dome shape adroitly associates itself with that domed shape in the simile "like the Cathedral of Saint Sofia at Constantinople" in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). In the latter text, Woolf elucidates:

> This shape, I thought, thinking back over certain famous novels, starts in one the kind of emotion that is appropriate to it. But that emotion at once blends itself with others, for the 'shape' is not made by the relation of stone to stone, but by the relation of human being and human being. (175)

Leaning on Mrs. Ramsay's knees, Lily imagines Mrs. Ramsay as "tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything" and which everyone is longing for (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 48). But Lily is exceptional; it is not the knowledge or sacredness suggested by these tablets but intimacy that she desires. When Mrs. Ramsay rises, Lily has felt some subtle changes becoming augmented in her – she senses that her relation with Mrs. Ramsay has become closer; she now sees Mrs. Ramsay as the dome.

Such intimacy is further manifested in Lily's purple triangular shape, which repeats ekphrastically the pattern of Mrs. Ramsay's self: the "wedge-shaped core of darkness" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 58). Mrs. Ramsay feels the shape of herself one night when the children have all gone to bed and she is finally alone. And she always feels the need "to be silent, to be alone" because that is when "one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being *oneself*, a wedge-shaped core of darkness" (58, my emphasis). In a trance, Mrs. Ramsay scrutinizes life and finds herself; she encounters one of her "moments of being." At this time when life sinks down, "the range of experience seemed limitless" (59). Mrs. Ramsay looks out of the window and meets the stroke of the lighthouse – "the long steady stroke, the last of the three, which was her stroke," since in this mood "one could not help attaching oneself to one thing" (59). Every night, the lighthouse sends out the strokes. But only tonight the stroke finds Mrs. Ramsay; only tonight the

cotton wool of non-being is removed. Mrs. Ramsay's "moment of being" is not epiphanic; rather, it is a condensed moment when "things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity" (59) and through that moment she, as "the wedge-shaped core of darkness," is embodied in the stroke. Thus, Lily's triangular shape captures the shape of Mrs. Ramsay's core of darkness which is "invisible to others" (58). Though Mrs. Ramsay and Lily never openly talk about this moment, the repetitive patterns connect the two of them, who share a close relationship. The connection, however, does not simply mean that the shape symbolizes Mrs. Ramsay; Lily's graphic representation of Mrs. Ramsay further represents her seizure of Mrs. Ramsay's "moment of being," and the intimacy she and Mrs. Ramsay share.

"I Have Had My Vision": Unity in Art and Life

How an artist orders his/her world is one question Woolf has frequently visited. In her transcriptions of *Lighthouse*, Woolf writes:

> For, as a painter takes his brush and draws a line on the blank canvas to which everything in his picture must conform, so De Foe takes his pen and upon the very first page depicts a large uncompromising solid object, an earthenware pot, a chopping block – which we cannot evade or think into non-existence. (*Essays* 4: 333)

The comment clarifies how conformity and unity take precedence in Woolf's world, and the metaphorical line is explicitly linked to Lily's final brushstroke. Under the specific context of the transcriptions of *Lighthouse*, such conformity and unity inferred by Woolf are moreover realized in formalist relations designated by the key word "line." Unity is also at the heart of Bloomsbury formalism: "Unity of some kind is necessary for our restful contemplation if the work of art as a whole," Fry wrote, "since if it lacks unity we cannot contemplate it in its entirety," and unity is achieved "due to a balancing of the attractions to the eye about the central *line* of the picture" (*Vision and Design* ch. 2, my emphasis).

The question that bothers Lily is "how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left," and she hesitates to make any move because "the danger was that by doing that *the unity of the whole* might be

broken" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 51, my emphasis). One inspiring moment comes to Lily in the dinner scene, where she feels confused that Mrs. Ramsay, who looks worn and whose life is only evoked by others, should pity Mr. Bankes, who has his own work. The notion of having one's own work suddenly strikes Lily, "as if she had found a treasure," since she, too, has her work (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 78); her life is hence evoked by no one else but by herself and her own work. With this in mind, Lily decides that she will "put the tree further in the middle" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 79). The adoption of the tree image is a deliberate choice. Elaborating on relations among objects in her *Essays*, Woolf takes the ways of looking at trees as a model:

> For, simple in themselves, these objects can be made monstrous, strange, and indeed unrecognizable by the manner in which they are related to each other. People who live cheek by jowl and breathe the same air yet see trees very large and human beings very small, or the other way about, man vast and trees in miniature. Writers who live at the same moment yet see nothing the same size. (*Essays* 5: 332)

An artist, Woolf claims, should adjust structural relations so that the relations can keep up with the wit of his/her works. Lily's painting embodies Woolf's idea in the ekphrastic sense. The move of the tree is stimulated by the actual reality of the dinner scene, but it does not eidetically intimate the scene. Instead, the move is to representationality. The tree is repositioned by Lily to keep up with her unique perspective that she who owns her work has control over her life, that she does not have to depend on others. Later that evening, Lily decides that she "would move the tree rather more to the middle" when thinking that her life does not need a marriage to be meaningful (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 94). Moving the tree to the middle of Lily's composition breaks the vacancy in the foreground of her painting, thus achieving formalist unity. And on the representational level, by repositioning the tree, Lily has proved herself to be a self-contained artist, who can "rope[s] the whole universe into harmony" (Woolf, *Essays* 4: 335).

The ekphrastic tree also releases a narrative impulse. Since it is repositioned, the tree is not composed at a frozen moment, but has experienced its motion in terms of time and space. Temporally speaking,

the tree is placed closer and closer to the middle of Lily's composition as time goes by. And spatially speaking, the tree's position changes because Lily is mobile; she moves from the front of the house to the dinner table where she analyzes everyone until her unique perception unveils itself. The tree's current position thus unleashes the narrative progression.

But the mass has not been connected yet; a final stroke to "hold the design together" is still anticipated (Woolf, *Letters* 3: 385). It is after ten years that the solution comes to Lily. In Part Three, "The Lighthouse," Lily returns to the Ramsays' house with the intention of finishing the painting after Mrs. Ramsay's death. Still, Lily is faced with blasts of doubt and confusion: "she felt an obscure distress" because what she wants to paint eludes her, because she wants the ephemeral exhilaration of aesthetics: "what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 180).

But what is it? This "thing," this "very jar on the nerves" evaded her "when she thought of Mrs. Ramsay," and now "when she thought of her picture" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 180). Meditating on this, Lily darts a look at Mr. Carmichael who triggers her memories of Mrs. Ramsay. Lily tunnels through her memories and starts to remember things and people through Mrs. Ramsay's eyes: "If she wanted to be serious about him she had to help herself to Mrs. Ramsay's sayings, to look at him through her eyes" (184). By doing so, Lily is reliving the mundane and repetitive trifles as Mrs. Ramsay: "Lily looked up, as she had seen Mrs. Ramsay look up" (184). In these ordinary trifles, one would have a sense of constant repetition, of "one thing falling where another had fallen," yet the falling thing can still set up a chime in the air which makes full vibrations (184). Re-experiencing these trifles, Lily realises that they are "little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" (151) through which she feels "the old horror" (188). And within this horror she sees Mrs. Ramsay: "there she sat" (188). The epiphany falls upon Lily; quickly, as she sees it all clear for a second, Lily draws her last line in the centre, unites her masses, and reaches "the synthetic moment of an aesthetic creation" (Fry, "Words Wanted in Connexion with Art" 425).

Lily's epiphanic moment vividly connotes the "moments of being": it is one shock-receiving moment which brings Lily the old horror, and Lily

clarifies and unites the violently shocking moments through her recollections into her visual shock which, in McLaurin's words, "has its origin in the more general sensations of everyday life" (189). The "general sensations" underline "the thing" that has evaded Lily, which is a "level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time it's a miracle, it's an ecstasy" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 188). In her memoir, Woolf discovers that behind the cotton wool hides the essence of "the thing": "we are the words; we are the music; we are *the thing itself*. And I see this when I have a shock" ("Sketch" 72, my emphasis). By "we," Woolf designates our being: how we live, how we function, all of these compose the whole world as a work of art, and our beings are its parts.

The central line, invoked by the "moment of being" Lily has experienced, unleashes its ekphrastic significance. While the final brushstroke marks the completion of Lily's picture, the line does not resemble anything – it does not mimic a human shape. Rather, it represents artistic unity, which further represents the harmony and oneness in life. When Lily is struck by her "moment of being," and thus is eventually capable of her vision of wholeness, she does not only see through Mrs. Ramsay's eyes but also, to some extent, becomes Mrs. Ramsay. In the scene when Mrs. Ramsay quickly goes upstairs alone after the banquet, to "pick out one particular thing; the thing that mattered," she has the sense that "all must be in order," and that she is supposed to maintain the order (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 104). Ten years later, Lily does the same: on her canvas she makes order out of chaos. She now "becomes one with Mrs. Ramsay, is identified with Mrs. Ramsay as ten years before she had desired to be . . . they share a gift, only the results are different" (Proudfit 35).

The line also stimulates the narrative impulse. After the final brushstroke, Lily declares her triumph: "Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 194). Woolf's choice of the word "vision" is not accidental. In her biography of Fry, Woolf assigned the word *design* for intellect and *vision* for emotions: "But while every sensation was to be savoured, and none rejected offhand, a balance seemed to have been arrived at – a balance between the emotions and the intellect, between Vision and Design" (*Roger Fry* 245). A balance

is "arrived at"; Woolf's word choice suggests an excursion toward balance: it is not achieved instantly. Similarly, Lily's balance – her vision of wholeness and unity both in art and life – is brought about with the passage of time.

Conclusion

Thinking of the problem of space that remained on her canvas, Lily reaffirms how she would like her painting to be: "Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours on a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron" (Woolf, *Lighthouse* 160). Lily's anticipations of her picture imply her vision: something ephemeral should lie upon solid foundations. Lily works out the ephemeral surface by converting the painterly verisimilitudes to form, and beneath this surface is the heavy, solid past into which Lily dips her brushes and immerses herself to reexperience those "moments of being". The painting, balanced between the past and the present, now becomes a thing one "could ruffle with [one's] breath," but, at the same time, "could not dislodge with a team of horses" (160). As Lily poses ingeniously in the earlier metaphor, when she sees her picture, she sees "the light of a butterfly's wing lying upon the arches of a cathedral" (46). Formalist relations between shapes, colours, lights and shades are the ethereal "wing," while "bolts of iron" stem from everyday life. While formalists stay highly attentive to the pure aesthetics and vigilant of the idea of representation, Woolf instead organically readjusts the relation between formalism and representation – especially the represented everyday life. Let there be a concord, she may think, for arts have their matrix in life.

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