Erin Greer
UC Berkeley Department of English
322 Wheeler Hall
Berkeley, CA 94720
Erin.greer@berkeley.edu

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"Dumb Colloquy: The Aesthetics of Conversation and Conversational Aesthetics of *To the Lighthouse*"

Abstract

If the defining task of an ordinary language philosopher is, in Stanley Cavell's words, to "express, as fully as he [sic] can, his world, and attract our undivided attention to our own," Virginia Woolf undoubtedly qualifies as such a philosopher. The novel in which she most explicitly thematizes acts of visual attention, *To the Lighthouse*, suggests further affinity with Cavell's brand of Wittgensteinian philosophy through its use of a trope at the heart of Cavell's philosophy: conversation. That conversation is central to Woolf's philosophical project is paradoxically implied by the famous obliqueness of her representation of discourse: it is often difficult to distinguish spoken conversation in Woolf's novels from unspoken exchanges, and it may even seem that the true subject of *To the Lighthouse* is the "dumb colloquy" that simultaneously connects and separates characters.

This suggestive phrase appears twice in the novel, and surprisingly it refers not to nonverbal communication, but rather to a mode of perception, an attentive, dialogic relation with the world, which becomes the basis for Lily Briscoe's aesthetic practice, her "exacting form of intercourse." Tracing correspondences between *To the Lighthouse* and Cavell's ordinary language philosophy, and articulating the novel's own aesthetics of spoken conversation, this paper explores the ethical, philosophical, and aesthetic implications of a theory of perception as colloquy. Many of the political and philosophical concerns characteristic of Woolf's work crystallize in *To the Lighthouse* in the figure of conversation, and the novel ultimately suggests a philosophy of acknowledgment relevant to both ethical interpersonal relations, and humans' relations with the nonhuman world.

About the author

Erin Greer is a doctoral candidate in English at UC Berkeley. Her dissertation articulates a philosophy of conversation through reading Victorian and Modernist British literature alongside ordinary language philosophy, queer theory, and critical political theory, crystalizing questions about intimacy, otherness, language and community. She previously completed a Masters at the University of Oxford in 2010 with a dissertation on Virginia Woolf.

"Dumb Colloquy: The Aesthetics of Conversation and Conversational Aesthetics of *To the Lighthouse*"

To the Lighthouse opens in the middle of a conversation. The opening words – Mrs. Ramsay's assurance to her son James that, "of course, if it's fine tomorrow," they will go to the Lighthouse – compose one of the few clearly-marked lines of dialogue in a novel that is nonetheless deeply engaged with the question of conversation.[i] A good deal of the novel's communication appears to take place silently, to such an extent that the novel seems almost to record variations of what the narrative twice calls "dumb colloquy."[ii] Each time the phrase appears, however, it refers not to the wordless dialogue so frequently occurring between characters, but rather to moments of apparently private experience. Following the intimations of this phrase, and the similar term "intercourse" as used to describe Lily Briscoe's artistic practice, this paper will elucidate an ethically-charged conversational figure at the heart of Woolf's aesthetic. Many of the political and philosophical concerns characteristic of Woolf's work crystallize in *To the Lighthouse* in this figure of conversation, through which the novel ultimately suggests a Cavellian philosophy of acknowledgment relevant to both ethical interpersonal relations, and humans' relations with the nonhuman world.

That conversation is central to Woolf's philosophical project is paradoxically implied by the famous obliqueness of her representation of discourse: it is often difficult to distinguish spoken conversation in Woolf's novels from unspoken exchanges, and it may even seem that the true subject of *To the Lighthouse* is the "dumb colloquy" that simultaneously connects and separates characters. The ongoing silent dialogue between the Ramsays throughout the first section of the novel pertains to the nature of conversation, speech, and representation more generally: while Mr. Ramsay prioritizes "speaking accurately," Mrs. Ramsay hedges in deference

to the "thin veils of civilization." The overt conversation concerning the feasibility of a trip to the Lighthouse overlays this sub-conversational debate about the relation of "truth" to decorative, dissimulating linguistic representation, while Lily Briscoe more explicitly questions the relation between "truth" and visual aesthetic representation. The dinner party scene illuminates the rhythms and social, class, and gender-based conventions of speech, and in fact explicitly positions the conversation that results from Mrs. Ramsay's deft social manipulations as an aesthetic work. Further elucidation of the specific characteristics of this aesthetic product, the dinner table conversation, must await a longer paper, however.

Turning now to the novel's "conversational aesthetic" and its correspondence with ordinary language philosophy, I want to begin by looking at a passage that seems initially to fly in the face of one of Wittgenstein's key tenets, the impossibility of private language. Recall the first page's depiction of James Ramsay's perception of his parents' conversation:

> To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled… The wheelbarrow, the lawnmower, the sound of poplar trees, leaves whitening before rain, rooks cawing, brooms knocking, dresses rustling – all these were so colored and distinguished in his mind that he had already his private code, his secret language, though he appeared the image of stark and uncompromising severity. (3-4)

With Wittgenstein, we might observe that in order for something to be a "language," it must share conventions between more than one language speaker; rather than discrediting Woolf's analogy, this Wittgensteinian qualification anticipates the text's application of the terms "dumb colloquy" and "exacting intercourse" to moments of private perception.[iii] This opening passage proposes the "secret language" as a metaphor for perception, and the later analogies turn this metaphor for perceptive experience more explicitly into an exchange between "speakers," where the "speakers" are the self and the world, and in which the exchange generates or follows its own extra-ordinary language. Read in terms of the later analogies, James's "secret language" becomes

a "language" mediating an exchange between James and his world, not a private language filtering the world in his purely distinct subjectivity. Such language would be "secret" from those outside the conversation, unique to James's exchange with the world, but not solipsistic. Again, what Wittgenstein helps us remember is that such an exchange between self and world is only "language" when it follows conventions shared by two "speakers" of the language. That Woolf anticipates, or presupposes, such an understanding of language, while transferring it to an exchange between humans and nonhumans that might excite Object-Oriented Ontologists and eco-critics more generally, is demonstrated in the moments in which the novel explicitly proposes perception as "colloquy."

The phrase "dumb colloquy" first appears in a description of William Bankes's manner of looking at sand dunes, which seem to reveal to him the nature of his relationship with Mr. Ramsay:

> Looking at the far sand hills, William Bankes thought of Ramsay […] The pulp had gone out of their friendship. ~~[…]~~ in this dumb colloquy with the sand dunes he maintained that his affection for Ramsay had in no way diminished; but there, like the body of a young man laid up in peat for a century, with the red fresh on his lips, was his friendship, in its acuteness and reality, laid up across the bay among the sandhills […] That was it. He finished. He turned from the view. And, turning to walk back the other way, up the drive, Mr. Bankes was alive to things which would not have struck him had not those sandhills revealed to him the body of his friendship lying with the red on its lips laid up in peat. (20-21)

The metaphor of "colloquy" seems inappropriate to Bankes's projection of his own thoughts onto the inanimate scenery, but it is worth also noting what this curious designation implies about the nature of understanding: Bankes endows the hills with the function of interlocutor in order to discover his own thoughts, as though recollection and understanding require response from and organization by an/other. Bankes's side of the "colloquy" is to maintain, to insist, while the hills' "response" is visual and figurative: an image of a body arrested by death and preserved in

perpetual youth. The "things" to which Bankes is "alive" following this "colloquy" are not present to him in explicit, linguistic terms, but rather represent a kind of scenic interpretive understanding. The irony or discordance of the designation "colloquy" in this scene highlights a tendency the book reminds us is intrinsic to all conversations: throughout *To the Lighthouse,* we see many instances of characters inventing the other with whom to interact according to their own needs or abilities.[iv]

The second time the phrase appears, however, it indicates a different relation between self and other, one in which egoistic needs do not dictate the terms of the exchange. The phrase appears as part of Lily's perception of Mr. Ramsay in a sudden moment of impersonality, during which "it seemed as if he had shed worries and ambitions, and the hope of sympathy and the desire for praise" (156). Lily conceives of this state as one of "dumb colloquy, whether with himself or another" (156). The idea of colloquy once again encompasses a mode of thought figured as dialogue, and this time, the feature of impersonality, the shedding of personal vanity, insecurity, hopes, and demands upon others, is crucial. This vision of Mr. Ramsay's impersonality attributes him with the qualities of Woolf's idea of the androgynous aesthetic state.

Lily's admiration of Mr. Ramsay prefigures the text's descriptions of her own painterly process through the shared analogy of conversational exchange, which suggests that Woolf's crucial notion of impersonality or androgyny can be understood as preparatory to a kind of conversational engagement with the world. Two pages after Lily's observation of Mr. Ramsay's "dumb colloquy," she prepares to paint by "subdu[ing] the impertinences and irrelevances that plucked her attention and made her remember how she was such and such a person, had such and such relations to people" (157). She is "drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people" in order to begin what she imagines as "an exacting form of intercourse" with "this

other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention" (158). Lily's "intercourse" with *this* truth - personified, particular and not necessarily transcendent – exposes her. She is receptive to the claims laid upon her by the "other" that resides behind appearances, becoming a "soul reft of body" (159). A genuine exchange seems to be taking place, a dialogue rather than a projection like Mr. Bankes's, in Lily's act of looking upon the scene that she wishes to paint.

Lily's sensitivity to the particularity of "*this* truth, *this* reality [my emphasis]" suggests openness to something fully exterior to herself. Her attitude to truth is dialogic, responsive and motile, characterized by a sense of vulnerability to the otherness of the world, and as such it is quite different from the attitude Mr. Ramsay famously assumes in relation to "truth" imagined in terms of logos. According to Mr. Ramsay's conceptual terms, in which thought is "like the alphabet," what is required in order to ascertain metaphysical truth is either "superhuman strength… plodding and persevering" from A to Z in a fashion conceived via the masculine metaphor of a polar expedition, or the genius vision that, "miraculously, lump[s] all the letters together in one flash" (33, 34). Lily, like Mr. Ramsay, is concerned about "subject and object and the nature of reality," but for her, there is no steady, ordered and arranged "reality;" there is instead *this* reality, *this* truth, which lays its hands on her rather than the reverse; she does not "pursue" truth, but rather opens herself up vulnerably to "intercourse" with it, suffering as "a soul reft of body" (158).

The significance of this conversational approach to truth is further clarified by juxtaposition with Lily's much earlier approach to the "truth" of Mrs. Ramsay, when she conceives it as the "secret" "lock[ed] up within her," something expressed through the simile of "treasures in tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions" (50-51). Lily's fantasy at this

moment proposes a view of the mind similar to that of Mr. Ramsay, figuring the interior of the other in terms of both logos and chauvinistic exploration: the "tombs of kings" and "tablets bearing sacred inscriptions" that must be decoded suggest an even more aggressive imperialism than Mr. Ramsay's polar expedition.[v] The novel suggests that Mr. Ramsay's philosophical pursuits are an intellectual extension of the hubristic projects of exploration, and Lily's initial impulse to prise open the chambers of Mrs. Ramsay's mind and heart appears to be similarly imperialistic.[vi]

But as the passage portraying Lily's desire continues, it becomes clear that she does not wish to merely "read" the contents of Mrs. Ramsay's mind, or heart. Turning to the question of method – "what art was there, known to love or cunning" - Lily's reflections reveal that she desires "intimacy" beyond the knowledge aligned with language: "it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge" (51). Lily blurs the distinctions between intimacy, knowledge, and unity, imagining "mingling" intellectually and emotionally such that the barrier bridged unsatisfactorily by language would cease to exist, and the otherness of Mrs. Ramsay would dissolve. But the desired merger does not happen, of course, and Lily is left wondering, "How then … did one know one thing or another thing about people, sealed as they were?" (51).

We might read Lily's resumption of painting in the final section of the novel as an attempt to answer this question, or, rather, to dissolve the question by seeing it through. I am thinking here of Wittgenstein's idea that the answer to a question is equivalent to its disappearance, and Stanley Cavell's argument that Wittgenstein's formulation of philosophy's self-negation offers a model of the kind of knowledge that follows aesthetic experience.[vii] Cavell

likens philosophy's self-cancelation to the way that we "find ourselves *within* the experience of [aesthetic] compositions, following them;" we "follow" works of art until we stop asking questions about what they are showing us, or how.[viii] Expanding upon the analogy, Cavell connects aesthetics, philosophy, and the speaking-cures of psychoanalysis:

> The more one learns, so to speak, the hang of oneself, and mounts one's problems, the less one is able to *say* what one has learned; not because you have *forgotten* what it was, but because nothing you said would seem like an answer or a solution: there is no longer any question or problem which your words would match. You have reached conviction, but not about a proposition; and consistency, but not in a theory. You are different, what you recognize as problems are different, your world is different… And this is the sense, the only sense, in which what a work of art means cannot be *said*. Believing it is seeing it. (85-86)

The model of discovery here is far from Mr. Ramsay's picture of progressing through the alphabet, or of discovering the full range of letters in a flash of genius; rather, Cavell (with Wittgenstein) describes a process in which problems or questions gradually dissolve, rendering unspeakable whatever is discovered at the moment of its discovery. The process by which we attain this aesthetic sort of knowledge seems almost dialectical, whereby initial problems disappear through the process of working themselves out fully, carrying their own logic through to the extreme and making the mode of framing the problem itself yield insight.[ix]

The knowledge gained by this aesthetic process is rather like the "intimacy" Lily desires, something beyond language and only attainable in a manner of experience that undoes the objectification of the knowledge. What Lily seeks, finally, and conceives in terms of conversation, might be close to what Cavell calls "acknowledgment". A concession to the impossibility of attaining perfect knowledge of the world that exceeds us, acknowledgment entails not only permitting the other's otherness to persist, intact and separate from us, but also responding to the other's presence, recognizing that the other's inconceivable reality establishes a

relation in which we bear responsibility. Acknowledgement is a kind of knowledge that knows its limitations and also calls one to account for this "knowledge": to truly acknowledge that another is in pain, for instance, entails some sort of response to the other's experience, a movement that demonstrates belief of a kind and quantity to stimulate response. Other minds, Cavell writes, are to be acknowledged rather than known, which requires "revealing ourselves, by allowing ourselves to be seen;" if we do not open ourselves toward the other in this way, "we convert the other into a character and make the world a stage for him" (333). An encounter can only have the ethical validity Cavell ascribes "acknowledgment" if it occurs between individuals who mutually recognize the limits of their knowledge, accept the other on his or her own terms, and reveal themselves to the other in turn.

Lily's final vision on the last page of the novel can be seen as simultaneously the solution and dissolution of her 'problem,' her desire to see and know and penetrate the secret chambers of Mrs. Ramsay. She resumes painting a picture that abstractly represents Mrs. Ramsay as a "triangular purple shape," a description that echoes the "wedge-shaped core of darkness" Mrs. Ramsay imagines herself to be most essentially. Lily only completes the picture, however, when she adds a line in the center that might be seen as a kind of dialectical cancellation and completion of the project of representation (209).[x] Resulting from a pre-artistic experience figured in terms of conversation, Lily's final vision and stroke are linked by Woolf with mediation, with language and the coloring and distinguishing of objects. The world communicates with the artist, and the artist communicates her experience through the representation that doubles the aesthetic experience. This again corresponds with Cavell's description of a feeling intrinsic, in his view, to aesthetic experience. Cavell writes, in a longer passage than I have time to cite, that "describing one's experience of art is itself a form of art,"

and moreover, that we are drafted under the "burden" to do so, once we experience a work of art (193). *To the Lighthouse* can accordingly be read as depicting Lily's artistic creation as an attempt to "describe" her aesthetic experience of the world, and of Mrs. Ramsay at its imaginative, affective center. The imperative that Cavell describes so affectingly is apparent in Lily's dogged "struggle[e] against terrific odds to maintain her courage, to say: 'But this is what I see; this is what I see'" (19). Reading Woolf with Cavell here suggests that artistic creation is a twofold process: a conversation with "this truth," and then the materialization of traces of this conversation, traces that are meant to make another *see* what the artist sees, or intercourses with.

Woolf makes it clear that looking and seeing are distinct; frequently characters look together upon the same scene – for instance, upon Mrs. Ramsay and James in the window, a centerpiece of fruit, sand dunes, the Lighthouse – but they *see* very different things. Art is one way of insisting not only that another *looks* with you, but *sees* with you. A final note from Cavell adds one more requirement in order to have a relation of "acknowledgement" with art and its world: "It is only in this perception of [others] as separate from me that I make them present. That I make them *other*, and face them" (338). In the context of this citation, Cavell is referring to characters in a play, but we could also take the description to apply to others in both real and fictional worlds. This is the way that Lily has learned to experience truth, in opening herself to its demands, acknowledging its otherness and its claims upon her, and it is the way in which we are meant to face an object of art, or the novel.[xi]

The novel in fact invites readers into conversation and a relation of acknowledgment, into making the novel *other*, and facing it. At the most literal level, the final line that helps Lily solve "the question … of some relation between those masses" comprising the scene, represents either the tree that she envisions moving to the middle, or, as some have suggested, the Lighthouse

(147-8).[xii] The line also serves as an allegory for the form of the novel, in which two narrative masses are connected by an apparently incongruous partition: "Time Passes" slices "The Window" and "The Lighthouse" asunder, while also unifying the whole.[xiii] Such aesthetic reflexivity, both on Lily's part and on Woolf's, also cues the viewer and the reader to the fact of mediation. The negativity of the line Lily draws and of the subject-less narration of the empty house in "Time Passes" suggests an impulse either to cancel this intervening mediation, or to cancel the pretense that the representation otherwise offered corresponds with transcendent "truth." In either case, the formal features confess the fact of subjective and formal intervention.

Pointing to the painting's paintliness, and the text's textuality, these lines insist upon the otherness of these aesthetic objects. This insistence upon otherness, the separateness and artificiality of the object, invites the audience into conversation: a relation of exchange rather than absorption, or immersion, and one in which "knowledge" is refigured as acknowledgment. If we are to seek the truth of *To the Lighthouse*, or any novel, as Lily seeks truth in her vision, we must read vulnerably, sensuously, opening ourselves to intercourse with the text. Cavell writes in *Must We Mean What We Say?* that, "All the [ordinary language] philosopher… can do is express, as fully as he [sic] can, his world, and attract our undivided attention to our own" (96). I suppose that, in the end, I am calling Woolf an ordinary language philosopher, both in the sense that she studies the many things and ways that words mean, in living discourse and in literature, and in the sense that her text – all literature, perhaps – simultaneously discloses a dialogic perspective upon "this truth," and invites readers to explore our own.

Notes

[i] All citations will be indicated in the body of the essay and come from the 1989 Harvest Books edition: Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse.* New York: Harvest Books, 1989, 4.

[ii] Many scholars have been interested in Woolf's representation of communication, and particularly her depiction of communication that occurs within silence. A good deal of this scholarship has read Woolf through the lenses of post-structuralism, recasting the silence of linguistic alienation in positive terms. See e.g. Miglena Nikolchina, *Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf.* New York: Other Press, 2004; Patricia Ondeck Laurence, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993; and Makiko Minow-Pinkney, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987. Julia Briggs' "The Conversation Behind the Conversation: Speaking the Unspeakable in Virginia Woolf" [*EA* 58-1 (2005): 6-14] provides a good overview of Woolf's treatment of what Briggs calls "the culturally unspeakable," taboo subjects including sexuality, trauma, war, same-sex love, and even friendships between women, directing attention to both Woolf's thematic and stylistic subversion of conventions obscuring open discussion (14).

[iii] I am thinking of the following moment in the *Philosophical Investigations:* "But could we also imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences – his feelings, moods, and the rest- for his private use? - Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language? - But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language." Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations.* trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001). section 243, 75e

[iv] In a longer paper, I would wish to explore this moment of Bankes's projection and creation of the "other" of the sandhills in relation to other moments when Woolf explores the way that subjects manufacture the others with whom they interact. Lily Briscoe's frustrated acquiescence to "making up scenes" about others in order to know them, Mrs. Ramsay's astonished recognition that Carrie Manning had persisted and changed beyond her capacity for imagination, and the discrepancy between "our apparitions, the things you know us by" and the "wedge-shaped core of darkness… invisible to others" all seem like moments in the novel that would, with Bankes's one-sided "colloquy," link *To the Lighthouse* with more contemporary theories of otherness, such as in the work of Derrida, Levinas, and Blanchot.

[v] There is a significant and growing trend in Woolf scholarship to delineate criticism of imperialism in her work. See, for example, David Bradshaw, `The Socio-Political Vision of the Novels,' in Sue Roe and Susan Sellers, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; rev. ed. 2008:191-208; Kathy Phillips, *Virginia Woolf Against Empire*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994; and Jane Marcus's influential "Britannia Rules the Waves" in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century Literary Canons.* Ed. Karen R Lawrence. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. 136-162. Specifically analyzing *To the Lighthouse*, Urmila Seshagiri's "Orienting Virginia Woolf: Race, Aesthetics, and Politics in *To the Lighthouse*" [*MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 50.1 (2004) 58-84] traces the hints of imperialism that especially appear in "The Window" through the presence of commodities gained in the colonies. Seshagiri also focuses on Lily Briscoe's "Chinese eyes," and argues that Woolf connects feminism to the Post-Impressionist's linking of "essentializing, Orientalist attitudes and the visual arts" (68).

[vi] As scholars have observed, the epistemological musings of Mr Ramsay were undoubtedly influenced both by Woolf's father's intellectual affiliations, and by the Cambridge philosophy of Bertrand Russell and GE Moore. See Benjamin Lee, *Talking Heads*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997, for biographical details about Woolf's exposure to such philosophy through Bloomsbury (211, 253). See also Ann Banfield, "Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time," *Poetics Today* 24 (2003): 471–516 and *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Michael Lackey, "Modernist Anti-Philosophicalism and Virginia Woolf's Critique of Philosophy." *Journal of Modern Literature* 29.4 (2006): 76-98; Mark Gaipa, "An Agnostic Daughter's Apology: Materialism, Spiritualism, and Ancestry in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*." *Journal of Modern Literature.* 26.2 (2003): 1-41; and Mark Hussey, *The Singing of the Real World: The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf's Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986, for further exploration of Woolf's treatment of such philosophical themes.

[vii] Cavell references the following quotations from *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations*: "The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem" (*Tractatus* 6.521; p187); "The clarity we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear" (*Investigations* §133); and "When no questions remain … just that is the *answer*" (*Tractatus* 6.52). Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co, 1922.

[viii] Cavell, Stanley. *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, [1987] 2003). 84. Subsequent quotations will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[ix] Dialectics, of course, is the mode of philosophy that exposes the fallacy of believing that a clear division between "subject and object" has anything to do with the "nature of reality."

[x] There is a long-running tradition of critics viewing *To the Lighthouse* in terms of dialectics, urged by the three-part structure of the book to think of it in terms of thesis-antithesis-synthesis; see, eg. Norman Friedman, "The Waters of Annihilation: Double Vision in To the Lighthouse," *ELH* 22 (1), 1955: 61–79, esp 63; Allen McLaurin, *Virginia Woolf: The Echoes Enslaved.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, esp 182; Gillian Beer, 'Hume, Stephen, and Elegy in To the Lighthouse', *Essays*

in Criticism, 34 (1984), 33-55, esp 47. My reference to dialectics invokes the more material-historical sense of the concept, in which the dialectic is a matter of *process* rather than final synthesis. For such a model of history, there is no final "platform of stability," but rather a constant revolution of the historically-infused present. Dialectical thought as represented by, for instance, Frederic Jameson, moreover implies the sort of critical self-reflexivity that I see in Lily's final line. See Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic.* New York: Verso, 2010. In this sense, my argument is closer to Elizabeth Abel's claim that "[Lily's] painting replays, without resolving, the dialectic of autonomy and continuity," although the opposition dialectically charged is not between autonomy and continuity, but rather between present and past, and subject and object. See Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, 71.

[xi] Seeing a similar appeal to the audience to engage with artwork, Marco Caracciolo argues that the novel shows how, in order "to interact with aesthetic artifacts we need to enter them with a virtual body, by 'tunneling' into their underlying blankness" ("Leaping into Space: The Two Aesthetics of *To the Lighthouse*." *Poetics Today* 31:2 (Summer 2010): 251-284, 272). Caracciolo's theory of virtuality is compelling, perhaps particularly within the scholarly conversation about new media, but Woolf's interest in conversation, and use of conversational metaphors to describe aesthetic experience, lead me to prefer conversation as the model of engagement between audience and artwork.

[xii] Francesco Mulas writes that the line represents the tree that Lily determines to move to the middle, during the dinner scene, "Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*: A Work in Progress from Vision to Reality". *AnnalSS* 5, 2005 (2009): 167-178, 176. Henry Harrington has made a strong case for viewing the line as the Lighthouse, in "The Central Line down the Middle of 'To the Lighthouse.'" *Contemporary Literature* 21.3 (Summer 1980): 363-382.

[xiii] Again, this analogy between the novel and the painting has often been noted by critics. See, e.g., Beer 36.