

Gestalt Psychology in the Modernist *Künstlerroman* of James
Joyce and Virginia Woolf

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MA by Research

University of York

English and Related Literature

March 2021

ABSTRACT

Gestalt theory of perception proposes that humans perceive objects as components within a greater whole. Gestalt psychologists, such as Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka, contend that the human mind is equipped with ‘gestalts’ - mental structures that help one process visual information in the most efficient way possible. This dissertation uses gestalt literary criticism to examine *Künstlerroman* novels in Anglophone modernism specifically: James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. Modernist fragmentation is based upon the relationships between fragments and their coming together to compose gestalts of narratives or characters. Gestalt formation is especially significant in the case of coming-of-age novels which describe the development of evolving artists. The protagonists of Joyce’s and Woolf’s novels, Stephen Dedalus and Lily Briscoe, compose gestalts of their artistic ideas and attempt to share them with others. While Stephen focuses on building a gestalt of his identity, Lily produces a gestalt of Mrs. Ramsay in order to finish her portrait. Gestalt literary criticism explains the complex processes of human perception and illuminates how artistic identity or artistic idea grows into a dynamic whole composed of seemingly unrelated fragments.

Word count: 30407

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PREFACE

This thesis offers a new reading of James Joyce's and Virginia Woolf's modernist *Künstlerroman* novels which draws in detail on the gestalt theory of perception. According to gestalt theorists, humans perceive the external world by looking for organised wholes, so-called gestalts, rather than by focusing on separate fragments. The theory can help explain the fragmented nature of Anglophone modernist literature. Modernist fragmentation is based upon relationships between fragments and their coming together to compose gestalts of narratives or characters. This process of perceptual unification is particularly significant in the case of coming-of-age novels such as Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) that describe the development of artistic identities and ideas through observing the environment. Not only do the protagonists, Stephen Dedalus and Lily Briscoe, need to devise concepts and compose original gestalts, but they also need to bridge the gap between internal and external layers of existence, express their ideas in material form, and thus reproduce their gestalts.

Both representatives of the modernist avant-garde movement in Anglophone literature, Joyce and Woolf broke away from previous literary traditions instead choosing experimental approaches to represent the character's development in a fragmentary manner, such as free verse or multiple narrative points of view. They undertook these efforts to better represent the societal and scientific changes which took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. Alluding to literary modernism, Woolf famously states in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" that "we must reconcile ourselves to a season of failures and fragments," and thus implies that one cannot expect characters' development to be fully complete and consistent (22). Woolf's words concern not only the expectations of readers but also the

deliberate artistic choice to abandon the idea of clear, linear development in favour of fragmentary and dynamic characterisation which seems to be more representative of reality. The author also writes in her diary: “Arrange whatever pieces come your way.” Even though she refers to making sense of emotional experiences, this quotation can also be understood as a suggestion for artists to portray their experience as it comes to them, focusing on the tensions between different pieces of incoming information and constructing gestalts (*A Writer's Diary*). This is how Woolf and Joyce portrayed artistic development in their novels: with evolving artists portrayed as active seekers of patterns in the environment and within themselves.

The protagonists of Joyce's and Woolf's *Künstlerroman* novels, Dedalus and Briscoe, are both developing artists who strive to glue together the fragments of their experiences and compose gestalts: portraits of themselves and others. Growing up, Stephen collects sensory impressions that help him both acquire a better understanding of the world around him and achieve linguistic virtuosity. He wants to build a gestalt of his artistic identity, independent of any external influences: “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets” (Joyce, *Portrait* 220). Lily's goal is different, in that she focuses on producing a gestalt of Mrs Ramsay and expressing this gestalt in the form of a portrait. In order to achieve this, she lets herself be overcome by the initially disparate sensory impressions which come to create a whole: “[...] how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore one up and threw one down with it” (Woolf, *TTL* 34). Both Stephen and Lily, in the end, come to terms with the inherent impossibility of fully accomplishing their goals, as a consequence of the subjectivity of perception and the dynamic nature of truth.

Gestalt psychology has most famously been used by visual art critic Rudolf Arnheim in *Towards a Psychology of Art* (1966) and literary critic Wolfgang Iser who discusses his gestalt-inspired ideas in both *The Act of Reading* (1978) and his essay “The Reading Process.” More recently, gestalt criticism was the central methodological focus of Anna M. McFarlane’s Ph.D. thesis on William Gibson’s science fiction novels and a key theoretical component of Cleo Hanaway-Oakley’s 2017 monograph, *James Joyce and the Phenomenology of Film* (2017). Apart from the aforementioned examples, gestalt literary criticism has been largely absent from contemporary literary criticism. In my thesis, I will draw on gestalt theorists such as Kurt Koffka, Max Wertheimer, and Wolfgang Köhler, as well as more recent gestalt-related concepts, such as Daniel Stern’s forms of vitality or engrams that explain memory distortions. In the remainder of this introduction, I will introduce the main principles of gestalt and describe how gestalt theory has been used in art and literary criticism. I will also explain the fragmentary nature of Anglophone modernist literature and the modernist move away from the traditional 19th-century *Bildungsroman* towards *Künstlerroman*. Finally, I will outline the productive relationship between gestalt psychology and the modernist *Künstlerroman*, explaining how gestalt psychology can help us understand modernist characterisation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot begin to express my thanks to the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of York which supported me in my academic endeavours over the last year. I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr Bryan Radley, whose patience, assistance and invaluable guidance inspired me to continue my research and explore the literary world. Dr Radley's strong belief in my work was instrumental in the successful completion of this project. I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr Lola Boorman for her knowledge and help in polishing this dissertation. Thanks should also go to University of York Library that never failed to provide me with crucial resources, even during the most challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic. Last but not least, I would like to thank my friends and partner for their unconditional love, support, and interest in my studies.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as Works Cited.

INTRODUCTION

0.1 Gestalt theory and its contribution

Since the beginning of philosophy, thinkers have been trying to solve the mystery of human perception. From Plato's distrust of sensory experiences through Locke's causal theory of perception, philosophers have come up with a variety of ideas explaining the ways in which our bodies interact with external stimuli.¹ Developed in the early decades of the twentieth century, gestalt psychology was one of the first psychological schools of thought to regard human beings as active seekers of meaningful patterns, who perceive objects as components within a greater whole (Woody and Viney 365-366). The gestaltists, such as Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka, contend that the human mind is equipped with 'gestalts' – mental structures that help one process visual information in the most efficient way possible: “When we are presented with a number of stimuli we do not as a rule experience ‘a number’ of individual things, this one and that and that. Instead, larger wholes separated from and related to one another are given in experience” (Wertheimer “Laws of Organization in Perceptual Form”). Instead of focusing on elements or parts, humans base their perception on different organisational patterns which help them filter through unnecessary information and grasp the most significant aspects of the external environment. Gestalt theorists also famously believed that the whole is different from the sum of its parts, suggesting that sometimes

¹ See Cooper and Dicker.

seemingly insignificant fragments can give rise to a significant whole (Heider 383).² Max Wertheimer and Kurt Koffka found several principles that guide human perception and explained these laws in their works, such as Wertheimer's 1923 article "Laws of Organization in Perceptual Forms" and Koffka's book *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (1935). The most significant gestalt principles are:

- **the figure/ground principle**, which examines how the human eye can separate a design shape from its background;
- **the similarity principle**, "the tendency of like parts to band together", such as objects having the same shape;
- **the proximity principle**, according to which our mind groups elements that are closest to each other;
- **the closure principle**, which states that the mind tends to perceive complete forms, and automatically fills the gaps if something is missing;
- **the continuation principle**, which relates to the mind's tendency to perceive lines as following a smooth, continuous path;
- **the past experience principle**, which denotes that the human mind groups stimuli according to expectations shaped by past experience;
- **the Prägnanz law**, which states that humans perceive ambiguous stimuli in simplified forms;
- **the uniform destiny principle**, according to which elements moving in the same direction form a group, such as a flock of birds (Wertheimer "Laws of Organization in Perceptual Form").

² Koffka corrected the famous translation of the quote "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," asserting that the correct version of this statement is "the whole is different than the sum of its parts" (Heider 383).

Gestalt psychology largely revolutionised cognitive psychology. Underscoring the importance of the perceptual process over the perceived object, the gestaltists revealed how significant individual factors are in cognition. The core ideas and principles of gestalt psychology contributed to the development of many new psychological theories, such as Koffka's "ego-world field" which stresses the importance of interaction between the individual and the environment, or his innovative gestalt-influenced theory of child development, described in *The Growth of the Mind* (1924), which emphasises the importance of coherent wholes in sensory development. Inspired by the gestaltists, other psychologists and theorists developed significant gestalt-related ideas. Gestalt psychology was used, for example, to explain the workings of human memory. Psychologists pointed out that our brains' tendency to form coherent and complete gestalts distorts our memories (Koriat et al. 488). The most important concepts that I discuss in this thesis are the Zeigarnik Effect, which explains the human need for closure, and the relatively recent concept of forms of vitality: dynamic gestalts involving multisensory perception (Stern, *Forms of Vitality*; Woody and Viney 375-377). Gestalt theory has also been used by art theorists analysing the perception of paintings. In his famous essay collection *New essays on the Psychology of Art*, as well as in many of his other works, Rudolf Arnheim uses gestalt psychology to explain how the human mind organises visual art stimuli: [...] vision operates as a field process, meaning that the place and function of each component is determined by the structure as a whole [...] for example, the colour we perceive a certain object to be depends on the colours of its neighbors [...] (*New Essays* 17). Arnheim emphasises the subjectivity of artistic interpretation by showing how one fragment of the picture might influence our reception of the rest. Because perception is so dynamic and dependent on many factors, it becomes an art of its own: "far from being a mechanical recording of sensory elements, vision turned out to be a truly creative grasp of reality – imaginative, inventive, shrewd, and beautiful" (Arnheim, *Art and*

Visual Perception viii). In Arnheim's opinion, gestalt caused the artistic process to be seen not as a sublime gift from above, but rather as an elevated version of an experience common to all human beings: the experience of finding patterns and beauty in the external world.

0.2 Gestalt psychology in the modernist *Künstlerroman*

0.2.1 Anglophone modernist literature and fragmentation

Literary modernisms emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century as a result of major global changes. The changes were mainly associated with societal experience of warfare and scientific progress, which made the authors of various nationalities look for new artistic solutions, such as the fragmentation of narratives. In her book *Modernist Commitments*, Jessica Berman argues that modernism should be read transnationally claiming that "the specific ethical and political imperatives of worldwide modernisms link works to one another, forming nodes of interconnection that, in turn, help to extend and illuminate modernism's political commitments" (284). In other words, Berman believes that similar experiences of writers from all around the world inspired them to experiment with different writing techniques and fragmented narratives. Importantly for this thesis, British and Irish modernisms were particularly affected by the tragic experience of warfare and imperialism. According to Megan Quigley, "much modern Irish writing stems from the social fragmentation incurred by a colonial history," meaning that the political history of the country that resulted in emigration and civil war had a significant impact on the way modernist Irish writers portrayed the world in their novels ("Ireland" 187). As an expat, Joyce often touched upon the problem of emigration in his works, for example discussing Stephen Dedalus' experience of exile in Paris. Many British modernist writers were similarly influenced by their country's imperialism. Writing about Woolf, Marina Mackay notices that the author "seems unable to resist the familiar modernist vocabulary of expatriation and exile, even if in her case the voluntary deracination is spiritual rather than actual" (101). As a

feminist anti-nationalist, Woolf did not agree with the imperial politics of Britain, and thus she did not necessarily have a strong sense of belonging to her country. Even though she was not an actual expat like Joyce, they shared a feeling of alienation which prompted them both to discover new modes of expression, better suited to the fragmented reality they were facing.

Scientific progress was another factor that largely affected many modernist artists. Paul Sheehan, for example, noted that Anglophone modernism was heavily influenced by Einstein's theory of relativity by showing the subjectivity of experience:

Modernism responded to this unspoken authority by introducing discontinuity, heterogeneity and irregularity into the rhythms of nature (especially the circadian cycle) and technology (mechanical clock-time). With relativity, then, Einstein further weakened the regimen of temporal consistency. He showed that different observers can measure different times for the same event – if they are moving relative to each other (231).

With the rise of relativism and growing scepticism towards clear-cut moral values as well as religious institutions, society became increasingly interested in the workings of the human mind. Besides Freudian theories of consciousness and William James' concept of truth, the beginning of the twentieth century also marked the beginning of the gestalt theory of perception which revolutionised our understanding of human psychology. Having learnt that humans are not just passive receivers of sensory input and that our perception of the world is purely subjective, many Anglophone modernist writers relinquished narrative coherence for the sake of discontinuity. In contrast to the majority of pre-twentieth-century novels, modernist writing often does not follow a linear timeline, while characters' development is unstable and fragmented. Such a drastically different world, marked by moral relativism and hopelessness, required drastically different means of portraying it, giving rise to many new

artistic movements, such as cubism and surrealism. Many artists decided to let go of conventional techniques, realising that they failed to capture the reality of the disorderly state of twentieth century Europe.

As Stephen Kern suggests, Anglophone modernist writers followed visual artists' footsteps and started to experiment with their writing style by introducing fragmentation and renouncing both linear plot and the omniscient narrator (*Modernism After the Death of God* 6). Questioning the existence of objective truth about reality, many modernists refused to offer a singular description of a character; instead, they presented the character from many different sides, asking readers to establish their own subjective truth based on the offered fragments. A good example of such a multifaceted portrayal of a character is Gertrude Stein's *Making of Americans* (1925), in which the author describes each person from several perspectives and using a few slightly varied sentences. By doing so, Stein shows that human personality is too complex to be enclosed in a simple unilateral description. Similarly, in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf introduces Lily Briscoe both through the character's own stream of consciousness and through the eyes of other characters, mainly Mrs Ramsay. Such a multifaceted characterisation ensures the character's genuineness and further asserts that there is no one objective truth behind an individual. Rather, the truth remains fragmented: composed of several different beliefs and opinions that readers must glue together to understand the character's full image.

0.2.2 The Modernist *Künstlerroman*

This thesis focuses specifically on *Künstlerroman* (in Anglophone modernism), a subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*, and the ways in which it was approached and reinvigorated by modernist writers. According to Sara Lyons, a typical *Bildungsroman* narrative is “a conservative fable of socialization,” where the main character's development entails conforming to social pressures (2). Franco Moretti claims that *Bildungsroman* represents a

perfect fusion between one's personal needs and social standards, and thus resolves the conflicts between "individuality and socialization, autonomy and normality, interiority and objectification" (16). Because this apparent symbiosis dovetailed with the Victorian fascination of the idea of self-improvement and learning from experience, *Bildungsroman* became highly popular among Victorian writers: it gave them an opportunity to show that the world, in Moretti's words, is "what it should be according to the principles of the dominant ethic" (Moore 39; 72). Instead of focusing on the inharmonious and fragmented reality, the traditional *Bildungsroman* portrayed an individual as a fragment of an integrated and balanced whole.

This perfect wholeness is most likely what made the traditional *Bildungsroman* so short-lived. Criticising the genre for its naivety, Moretti notices that the genre was "too perfect" and that "the historico-cultural context suited to the 'perfection' of the classical *Bildungsroman* had an unusually brief life" (72). He believes that the characters regress rather than progress in their development by conforming to social rules and an oversimplified moral code that assumes a clear boundary between right and wrong (187). Similarly, Kern contends that these realist novels are based upon the characters' linear growth and a strong sense of purpose associated with the Christian idea of providence, which does not necessarily mirror the more disrupted and desultory personality development that occurs in real life (*The Modernist Novel* 40-41). For precisely the same reasons, modernist novelists substantially dissented from the classical *Bildungsroman*. Considering the traditional method naive and unrealistic, the modernists developed their own narratives which mocked their precursors' approach and were devoid of a strong sense of purpose or belief in destiny. Instead, their characters follow a fragmented and coincidental developmental trajectory, full of failures and vicious circles. In Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, for example, the eponymous character has several opportunities, such as a trip to London or education at Cambridge; however, he does

not take full advantage of them, and thus fails to advance in his development. In her diaries, Woolf mentions that Jacob's lack of clear purpose helped her achieve "looseness and lightness [and] ... an inconsequence" (Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*). Wishing to "enclose the human heart," she reveals that she wants to keep "all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humor [...]" (Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*). In other words, the absence of an artificially imposed sense of destiny allows Woolf to emphasise the importance of seemingly unimportant quotidian moments in the life of a maturing person. Discarding the perfect wholeness of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the modernists committed themselves to the imperfect, but genuine, fragmented reality.

Anglophone modernists portray the fragmented developmental trajectory by means of a subgenre of *Bildungsroman* – *Künstlerroman*, a novel that describes the growth of an artist. Gregory Castle argues that the development of the modernist version of *Bildungsroman* happened from the 1890s through the 1930s alongside "a general breakdown in the authority of the essential, autonomous self, a general challenge to traditional models of identity formation [...]" which prompted the novelists to portray character development in a non-traditional way (370). Characters of some *Künstlerroman* in Anglophone modernism might still pursue some kind of goal; however, the goal is not about reconciling social expectations with personal ambitions but is rather about learning to express one's individuality and to channel one's ambitions into artistic success. Edward Engelberg notices that the traditional German *Bildungsroman* is "almost antithetical" to the *Künstlerroman* in that it associates identity development with becoming socially useful and renouncing artistic ambitions, while *Künstlerroman* focuses on individualistic development and rebelling against social standards (94). Often referred to as anti-heroes by critics, the characters of the modernist *Künstlerroman* often lack features commonly associated with heroism, such as bravery, strength or physical allure (Kern, *The Modernist Novel* 34-35). They are clumsy, immoral and

unattractive, but at the same time admirable for their sensitivity or insightfulness. Carl Malmgren also mentions an unusual, foreign-sounding name and parents whose behaviour often reflects the protagonist's identity crisis as other anti-heroic characteristics (6). Both Joyce's *Portrait* and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* constitute good examples of this flavour of Anglophone modernist *Künstlerroman*, featuring a protagonists who displays all the above-mentioned characteristics. Stephen Dedalus' mythical last name denotes his artistic vocation, which he tries to follow by denouncing his nationality and religion. The novel opens and closes with a statement expressing the desire to pursue art. The Latin epigraph ("Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes") is literally translated as "And he applies his mind to unknown arts," while the final sentence of the novel is Stephen's call to mythical Daedalus: "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead" (Joyce, *Portrait* 276). Joyce thus makes it clear that Stephen's purpose is creating art and finding his own autonomous voice. So even though the young man's path to artistic success appears rather bumpy or even futile, there is a destination which Stephen attempts to reach.

Lily Briscoe, the protagonist of *To the Lighthouse* also exemplifies the modernist anti-hero. She displays strong artistic vocation, choosing art over married domestic life even though she might not achieve success: "With her little Chinese eyes and her puckered-up face, she would never marry; one could not take her painting very seriously; she was an independent little creature, and Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it" (Woolf, *TTL* 13). Woolf portrays Lily not only as a devoted artist but also as an outsider. According to Seshagiri, the painter's "little Chinese eyes" "exclude her socially and elevate her artistically" (96). Even though Lily does not have a foreign-sounding last name like Stephen, Woolf orientalises her appearance to make her stand out from the rest of the characters. Lily's facial characteristics symbolise her resistance to Victorian constraints; resistance that also transpires through her life choices (such as unwillingness to marry) and post-impressionist artistic vision. Lily is an

individualist (“an independent little creature”) which makes her an exemplary *Künstlerroman* protagonist.

0.2.3. Relationship between gestalt psychology and the modernist *Künstlerroman*

The turn of the twentieth century gave rise to numerous psychological and philosophical ideas which inspired their contemporaries to focus on human perception and characters’ unconscious struggles. Many Anglophone modernist writers drew from the new theories in their works, developing experimental narrative or characterisation modes, such as stream of consciousness inspired by William James’ discussion of “mind-wandering” in 1890 in *The Principles of Psychology* (Fernihough 66). One of the most famous examples of stream of consciousness is the “Penelope” episode of Joyce’s *Ulysses* which, according to Hanaway-Oakley, “interweaves the cerebral and the bodily/worldly”, the major characteristic of the Jamesian “stream” (55).³ Showing how reality affects an individual’s internal world helps Joyce to show the multifaceted natures of his characters, and thus enriches characterisation. Similar to James’ mind-wandering, Sigmund Freud’s free association featured in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) was another idea that inspired the modernists to concentrate on unconscious processes. Woolf was aware of Freud’s theories; his work was published by Hogarth Press, founded by Woolf with her husband, Leonard. Also, as a member of the Bloomsbury Group, she was exposed to the emerging psychoanalytic theory.⁴ Even though the writer criticised Freud and claimed that her knowledge of psychoanalytic

³ Fernihough believes that Woolf must have known James’ theories because in “Modern Fiction,” she uses the term “halo” – the same term which James uses to describe consciousness (68).

⁴ In her diary, Woolf reports talking to Lytton Strachey, another Bloomsbury Group member, about the British Sex Society. She recounts that the main focus of the society were Freud’s theories: “[...] 50 people of both sexes and various ages discussed without shame such questions as the deformity of Dean Swift’s penis; whether cats use the w.c.; self-abuse; incest—incest between parent and child when they are both unconscious of it, was their main theme, derived from Freud. . . . Lytton at different points exclaimed *Penis*: [...] We also discussed the future of the world; how we should like the professions to exist no longer; Keats; old age; politics; Bloomsbury hypnotism—a great many subjects (*The Diary*).

theory was minimal, she was undeniably affected by his works. In her essay “The Leaning Tower,” (1940) Woolf writes that “by analysing themselves, with help from Dr Freud, these writers have done a great deal to free us from nineteenth-century suppressions,” suggesting that Freud’s theories had, indeed, a positive impact on the world of modernist fiction (Woolf, *The Moment and other essays*). As Heather Roetto claims, “the two shared a similar technique of finding truth,” with Freud’s focus on free association and Woolf’s use of stream of consciousness in characterisation (29). They both believed that the best way of reaching the character’s essence is through observing the dynamic mental processes.

Emerging from the same melting pot of ideas as Freud and James, gestalt psychologists offered an alternative view of the human mind. While gestaltists’ work started around 1910 with Wertheimer’s experiments on perception around, it was Koffka who systematised gestalt approach in *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* released in 1935. Putting emphasis on sensation rather than on unconscious processes, he explains how the human mind makes sense of reality by finding predictable patterns. Oliver L. Reiser states that “Gestalt psychology [was], on the one hand, a revolt against sensationalistic and associationistic psychology, and, on the other hand, a repudiation of the doctrines of reflex behaviour” (557-558). Even though the gestaltists moved away from Freud’s view of the unconscious, they still saw all experience as meaningful, arguing that humans search for meaningful patterns in their environment continuously from birth to adulthood (Koffka, “On the Structure of the Unconscious” 67). In this sense, their views agreed with those of William James who also emphasised the primary importance of perception in his writings (Woody 87).

Gestalt theory can also be used to explain the fragmented character development in the modernist *Künstlerroman*. Because gestalt psychologists believed in the unity of senses, they claimed that when we look at the world, we do not perceive it as a collection of various

details, such as distinct colours or smells, but rather as an “integral image of gestalt” (Campen 154). Stimulation induces responses that generate a wide array of different sensory impressions which intermingle and give rise to gestalts (Campen 155). Instead of presenting characters by means of a stable, third-person narration, Anglophone modernists destabilised narration by introducing various focalisations and describing a character’s experience of reality as multisensory, often highly fragmented, impressions. Thanks to this heightened synaesthetic sensory perception, the characters create their own gestalts – images that reveal the unconscious workings of the mind and aid the development of their creativity. As Cretien van Campen claims, synaesthetes often see gestalts that others fail to notice and artistic synaesthetes use these for their own benefit to create original art. While the initial fragmentation of sensory impressions helps *Künstlerroman* characters remain sensitive to stimuli from the outside world, the eventual unification of these fragments (or, in other words, gestalt formation) is what drives their artistic development. In fact, John Gordon claims that “Joyce is a Gestaltist,” describing Joycean epiphanies as examples of harmonious wholes (106). Experiencing the epiphanies, Stephen composes gestalts of his artistic vision and grows as an artist.

Explanation of multimodal perception is, however, not the only way in which gestalt theory aids our understanding of modernist characters. Gestalt also clarifies the role of social background in the process of identity development. As mentioned earlier, gestalt theory led to the development of many other psychological theories, one of them being the idea of the “ego-world field” described by Koffka in *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*. Describing the relationship between the observer and the object, Koffka explains how different factors, such as emotions or social background, affect an individual’s attitude towards the world. Katz notices that Woolf often emphasised the importance of social factors in her works:

[...] indeed a central strand of her work defines the subject as shaped by the presence of precisely those historical, economic, and social conventions [...]. Most notably, in “A Room of One’s Own,” by emphasising the effect of material conditions on women and their work, and by suggesting that women writers must forge a different kind of sentence to express their minds [...] Woolf suggests that social surroundings shape character and in particular shape men’s and women’s minds differently (234-235).

Even though the modernists indeed defied the authority of social institutions and associated maturity with the development of individuality rather than with yielding to institutional expectations, they still noticed (often detrimental) effects that these institutions had on individuals. Woolf notices that “social surroundings shape character” because they inevitably influence an individual’s perception. Kern underscores the role of institutions in the modernist characterisation, noting that Woolf “highlights the fragmenting consequences of a patriarchal society that divided women within themselves and subordinated them to the domineering masculine principle,” while Joyce’s *Portrait* “dramatizes the pivotal role that anti-Catholicism played in his life” (*Modernism After the Death of God* 173, 180). The modernists thus do not evade writing about social expectations, but rather they emphasise the importance of resisting social influence. Koffka’s “ego-world field” can explain the characters’ relationship with the environment and the ways in which this relationship affects their perception of art by showing how an individual’s background reflects itself in gestalt formation.

One of the most important principles of gestalt psychology, the closure principle, can also be used to enrich our understanding of the anticlimactic nature of the modernist novel. The modernist character’s development is not only fragmented, but it also lacks the definitive resolution so typically associated with the *Bildungsroman* mode. Moretti calls traditional coming of age novels symbolic forms which are “fundamentally problem-solving devices”

and claims that “they are the means through which the cultural tensions and paradoxes produced by social conflict and historical change are disentangled” (243). One of the ways in which they resolve these tensions is a “particularly marked ending,” which helps the reader find the meaning behind the narrative and clearly see the character’s developmental path (Moretti 7). Modernist works, such as Joyce’s *Portrait*, “[deal] with problems [they are] unable to solve,” which is what marks the end of the traditional European *Bildungsroman* novel (243, 244). Just like other modernists, Joyce chose fragmentation and a lack of definite ending over a clear-cut narrative form with a fulfilling sense of closure. Woolf made a similar choice which is clearly visible in the aforementioned *Jacob’s Room*, but also in *To the Lighthouse* with Lily Briscoe submitting herself to a dynamic and ever-changing (rather than static) artistic vision. The modernist *Künstlerroman* thus defies the gestalt closure principle, going against the human tendency to perceive the world in complete forms. Not only is the character development discontinuous and incomplete, but the works of art produced by the protagonists remain unfinished as well. The narrator does not provide closure for the characters’ development, leaving it up to the readers to glue the fragments together. Similarly, the characters themselves come to terms with the incompleteness of their artistic endeavours and accede to the never-ending circle of creation.

Although I am not arguing for a straightforward, direct line of influence between gestalt psychology and the Anglophone modernist novelists examined in this thesis, gestalt approach to these *Künstlerromane* enriches the study of literary modernisms because it addresses their most pronounced characteristics, such as fragmentation or plot discontinuity. Whether or not Woolf and Joyce knew about the existence of gestalt theory, they were definitely aware of other psychological theories that influenced gestaltists, such as Freudian psychoanalysis. Focusing on the process of creating meaning out of seemingly unrelated fragments, gestalt reveals the beauty behind the dynamic nature of reality that changes along

with the perceiver. Most importantly for this thesis, gestalt explains the complex process of human perception, and thus shows how artistic identity develops. My aim is to offer a new perspective on *Künstlerroman* in Anglophone modernism specifically, placing particular emphasis on the importance of sensory perception in characterisations of emerging artists. I focus on Woolf and Joyce because they, as the two Anglophone modernist writers who experienced imperialism, war and rapid scientific progress, proposed alternative, perception-focused ways of portraying the development of alienated individuals who attempt to compose wholes of their identities while facing fragmented realities.

CHAPTER 1

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN AND STEPHEN'S TROUBLED PERCEPTION

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, James Joyce introduces readers to Stephen Dedalus, his literary alter ego; a young poet whose life (from early childhood to leaving home for college) we follow through the novel. As the plot unfolds, Stephen experiences dynamic interactions with his surroundings and develops his sense of self as an artist. These interactions are deeply synaesthetic, perceived simultaneously via multiple sensory modalities:

The corridors were darkly lit and the chapel was darkly lit. Soon all would be dark and sleeping. There was cold night air in the chapel and the marbles were the colour the sea was at night. The sea was cold day and night: but it was colder at night. It was cold and dark under the seawall beside his father's house. But the kettle would be on the hob to make a punch (Joyce, *Portrait* 14-15).

Using all his five senses, Stephen assembles gestalts – “configurations” – to make sense of the world around him even from his earliest years (Koffka, *The Growth of the Mind* 146). In the above-cited example, he composes a gestalt of the chapel, comparing the visual and haptic sensations of the room to those of the sea: “[...] marbles were the colour the sea was at night. The sea was cold day and night [...]” Using his memory and imagination, the boy arrives at his own perception of the room. The development of Stephen's independent artistic identity is, however, disturbed by cultural and religious influences. Joyce describes the boy's internal struggle between himself as a poet, as a member of the Dedalus family, as an Irishman, and as a Catholic when Stephen famously states in the last chapter of the novel: “You have asked me what I would do and what I would not do. I will tell you what I will do

and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church” (Joyce, *Portrait* 268).

In *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, Kurt Koffka elucidates the dynamic relationship between the ego and the external environment, where either the ego or an object can dominate (Tonder and Spehar 409; Koffka 584). Explaining his stance, Koffka refers to the subjective appraisal of art pieces; however, I believe that his idea can also be used to describe Stephen’s growth. As Koffka states in *The Growth of the Mind* (1924), “the development of perception depends upon the total environment, the milieu, and above all, upon the sociological conditions of this milieu” (370). While processing the external environment and composing gestalts, Stephen strives to create an independent artistic identity as a poet and fails to do so in the end. Instead, he enters a never-ending circle of creation where the struggle, or the process, bears more significance than the results. In the following chapter, I will discuss the ways in which Stephen’s mind, initially fully engaged in the immediate sensory exploration, slowly becomes more and more affected by religion and other social constructs. These constructs affect the boy’s sensory perception, and thus affect the gestalts he composes of the reality. I will start by analysing Stephen’s early childhood and the perceptive freedom associated with that period. Then, I will go on to discuss his language development as an example of gestalt formation. The last two parts of the chapter will be devoted to Stephen’s own artistic creations, namely his villanelle and his diary, which demonstrate how Stephen’s religious upbringing thwarts his artistic development by obstructing his perception of the world.

1.1 Immediate sensations and language

1.1.1 Forms of vitality, synaesthesia and world exploration

There are many scenes in *Portrait* which refer to multiple sensory modalities. These scenes bear a clear resemblance to the so-called “forms of vitality” that Daniel N. Stern describes in his book of the same name. Stern defines vitality as “a product of the mind’s integration of many internal and external events” or, in other words, the subjective experience of an object or situation (4). Vitality constitutes a gestalt of movement, time, force, space and intention, as perceived by the observer (Stern 4). Forms of vitality are above all dynamic, meaning that they are constantly moving and changing. We encounter them in our everyday lives (e.g. moving our eyebrows or smiling), but also while looking at different types of art. According to Stern, the infant is “first or predominantly sensible to vitality forms” (111). Koffka shares this belief in his book *The Growth of the Mind*, emphasising that while creating gestalts, children pay more attention to the dynamics of the images than, say, to contradictions (384). A child’s experience of vitality forms is largely multimodal, with dynamic stimuli registering before passive ones (Stern 112). Stephen’s perception of the external world, especially in the first chapters of *Portrait*, is largely synaesthetic and dynamic, undergoing constant changes: “And air in the corridor chilled him too. It was queer and wettish. But soon the gas would be lit and in burning it made a light noise like a little song” (8). The boy perceives the air not only as olfactory but also as haptic sensation (“wettish”). The lit gas evokes an auditory sensation: “it made a light noise like a little song.” This multimodal perception helps the boy develop an artistic sensitivity and skills which he might use as a mature poet, describing imaginatively diverse accompanying sensations.

The importance of sensory perception is emphasised from the very first pages of the novel, which describe Stephen’s encounters with his family members. The boy observes the world around him using all five senses, which helps him understand the dynamics of his

surroundings and orientate himself within that environment. As Joanna Thornborrow and Shân Wareing claim, “the language does not simply record what Stephen [...] was like as a baby, it actually simulates the experience” (170). The first described image is Stephen’s father’s face as seen from his son’s perspective: “[...] his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face” (Joyce, *Portrait* 3). The image evokes mainly visual impressions for young Stephen; it constitutes the boy’s first memory of the paterfamilias which he uses to consolidate the gestalt of his father. Later on, the passage mentions a melange of various tactile (“When you wet the bed, first it is warm then it gets cold”), olfactory (“His mother had a nicer smell than his father”), gustatory (“Dante gave him a cachou [...]”) and auditory (“She played on the piano the sailor’s hornpipe [...]”) impressions (Joyce, *Portrait* 3-4). Paul Copley believes that Stephen does not try to order the impressions, but rather he is “besieged by numerous sensations and impulses” (147). According to the gestaltists, however, Stephen already starts making sense of these impressions, grouping them into so-called configurations or gestalts (Koffka, *The Growth of the Mind* 146). This grouping constitutes his first step towards actively learning about the external world. Instead of passively receiving the sensory information, young Stephen orders it to better process his surroundings.

Stephen’s perception of places is also described in a vital and synaesthetic manner. Diverse sensory impressions help the boy orient himself and understand his place in his surroundings. One example of such a description is Stephen’s experience of the lavatory which focuses on the prominent effect that visual impressions exert on the boy’s tactile experience: “To remember that and the white look of the lavatory made him feel cold and then hot. There were two cocks that you turned and water came out: cold and hot. He felt cold and then a little hot: and he could see the names printed on the cocks. That was a very queer thing (Joyce, *Portrait* 8).” The image of the lavatory which Stephen constructs does not seem to be coherent; on the contrary, it is erratic, with the boy’s sense of temperature constantly

changing from hot to cold, for example. However, Koffka states that children do not necessarily feel “the need of harmony with the rest of experience” because they do not yet understand relationships between different aspects of experience (*The Growth of the Mind* 347). Contradictions do not matter to the child with “liveliness, active power, and mystical characteristics being of much greater importance” (Koffka, *The Growth of the Mind* 352). Stephen internalises the images which he perceives: he does not see “the white look of the lavatory” and “the names printed on the cocks” only with his eyes, but with his whole body: “He felt cold and then a little hot.” As David Robinson notes, these images “define” the boy (334). Even though the gestalt of the lavatory is not static and coherent, it still helps Stephen gain his own individual understanding of the world. Internalising the sensations constitutes one of the boy’s first steps on the way to a fully realised artistic freedom and creativity.

Stephen’s creativity unravels most noticeably a little later in Chapter I when external sensory impressions become just a cue for activating the boy’s inner images and sensations. When Stephen ponders over different coloured roses, he remembers the song that he sang as a child, changing the lyrics, so that it seems to refer to green roses:

White roses and red roses: those were beautiful colours to think of. And the cards for first place and second place and third place were beautiful colours too: pink and cream and lavender. Lavender and cream and pink roses were beautiful to think of. Perhaps a wild rose might be like those colours and he remembered the song about the wild rose blossoms on the little green place. But you could not have a green rose. But perhaps somewhere in the world you could (Joyce, *Portrait* 9).

In the beginning, Stephen considers only the roses which definitely occur in the natural world: white, red, pink, cream and lavender ones. Even though in that aspect, he remains grounded, his thought process remains dynamic and synaesthetic. While thinking about the

visual impression of colour, Stephen remembers an auditory sensation – the above-mentioned song from his childhood. At first, he refutes his own childhood idea and denies the existence of green roses; however, he quickly admits that one cannot definitively state that they do not exist: “But you could not have a green rose. But perhaps somewhere in the world you could.” Stephen slowly broadens his imaginative horizons and starts to perceive more than just immediate surroundings. Barbara Seward suggests that “by altering the wording he is exercising incipient creativity, and by positing a green rose he is creating in imagination that which does not exist elsewhere” (181). In other words, the boy creates his own gestalt of a rose – a green rose. The auditory sensation of the song prompts him to imagine the existence of a differently coloured rose. As previously quoted, Stern claims a vitality constitutes “a product of the mind’s integration of many internal and external events;” Stephen connects the external image of the rose with the internal, imagined one and comes to understand that, as a potential artist, he possesses the power to create his own reality, which might not necessarily mirror the one perceived with his eyes.⁵

Later in the chapter, Stephen starts to compose gestalts of non-material concepts, such as sensations. He makes associations between the yet unknown sensations, such as pain, and more familiar visual or auditory impressions to understand the unknown better. One example of such a comparison occurs in the passage which features Stephen’s pondering over the sounds that different beating objects would produce:

⁵ The coloured roses bear symbolic meanings that have been frequently discussed by scholars, including but not limited to Seward and Ćurko.

There were different kinds of pains for all the different kinds of sounds. A long thin cane would have a high whistling sound and he wondered what was that pain like. It made him shivery to think of it and cold: and what Athy said too. But what was there to laugh at in it? It made him shivery: but that was because you always felt like a shiver when you let down your trousers. It was the same in the bath when you undressed yourself (Joyce, *Portrait* 45).

Stephen's experience of pain here is not only multisensory but also imaginary. He imagines how it feels to be hit with different tools, based on their looks or the sounds they produce: "A long thin cane would have a high whistling sound." He has not experienced this kind of pain before, so he needs to envisage the sensation instead. The synaesthetic quality of this imagery helps Stephen's imagination because he can juxtapose the pain (with that "shivery" hint of potential masochistic pleasure) against more familiar sensations, such as the "high whistling sound." The multisensory perception leads, however, to the creation of a more complex gestalt. Even though, according to the Prägnanz law, the human mind strives to simplify the percepts, Stephen's mind does the opposite here: instead of simplifying his understanding of pain, he enriches his perception by engaging multiple sensory modalities. The engagement of various sensory powers and imaginations constitutes another important step in Stephen's artistic development.

The significant role of sensory perception in Stephen's life is also emphasised by his fear of darkness. Because the boy cannot use the sense of sight in darkness, he needs to rely on his imagination. Stephen's mind becomes more active, and he starts to perceive unreal, scary objects. While trying to fall asleep in the dormitory, Stephen sees phantom faces that seemingly try to speak to him in his dream: "All the dark was cold and strange. There were pale strange faces there, great eyes like carriage lamps. They were the ghosts of murderers, the figures of marshals who had received their death-wound on battlefields far

away over the sea. What did they wish to say that their faces were so strange?" (Joyce, *Portrait* 17). Stephen's mind makes him perceive ghostly figures in the dark. The figures do not constitute a part of ordinary material reality, which makes it difficult for Stephen to fathom their existence.⁶ Even though they are creations of his own mind, Stephen does not recognise what he sees. In fact, the boy directly admits that he is afraid of the dark earlier in the passage: "You would be lost in the dark. It made him afraid to think of how it was" (Joyce, *Portrait* 15). Not being able to use his eyes, he feels overwhelmed with his mind's creations. This experience, though horrifying for young Stephen, triggers his artistic imagination in a profoundly important way. The faces are non-material gestalts composed of the boy's past experiences. As Barbara Hardy claims, "Joyce fuses responses, memories and meditations to show growth and continuity" (234). As an exemplary *Künstlerroman*, *Portrait* portrays the exploration of Stephen's mind as an important step in artistic growth. Stephen draws inspiration from daily experience, such as violent images or troubling historical facts acquired at school. While evoking fear and a sense of insecurity, darkness also unleashes the boy's dynamic artistic inventiveness.

Stephen's short-sightedness also emphasises the omnipresence of darkness in the novel. With his glasses broken, the boy cannot use his eyes, which makes him delve into the mental realm. When the prefect does not believe that Stephen broke his glasses accidentally, Stephen goes to the rector's room to complain about being unfairly punished. Groping his way to the room, he passes through the dark corridor once again using his imaginative powers to make sense of his surroundings: "He peered in front of him and right and left through the gloom and thought that those must be portraits. It was dark and silent and his eyes were weak

⁶ For Freudian interpretations of Joyce's work associated with the Freudian "uncanny" or strangeness, see McDonald and Spoo.

and tired with tears so that he could not see. But he thought they were the portraits of the saints and great men of the order who were looking down on him silently [...]” (Joyce, *Portrait* 57). Because the corridor is “dark and silent,” not only can Stephen not see, but he can also not hear any incoming sounds. Lost without the help of his auditory and visual senses, the boy’s mind starts racing; instead of looking, Stephen uses his “internal sight” to navigate his way to the rector’s room: “[...] he could not see. But he thought they were the portraits of the saints [...].” Imagining the portraits’ reactions to his persona constitutes another example of Stephen unleashing artistic creativity. As Eishiro Ito claims, the “arrangement of these pictures indicates the continuous tradition of Jesuit education,” constantly reminding the students of their religious and academic background (39). It seems significant that in this scene, Stephen cannot fully perceive the external forces which shape his life. Not being able to discern the blurry outer world, the boy dives into the internal realm where he is the creator of his own reality. Even though a Jesuit education undoubtedly impacts Stephen’s perception, he still feels free to explore his artistic vision. Not being able to gaze at the portraits, Stephen imagines what they look like; and this reliance on intellect rather than sensory impressions puts him in control of the perceived reality.

While myopia and darkness undoubtedly boost Stephen’s imagination, they also render him more sensitive to the smells, sounds and haptic feedback of the environment. Not being able to see his surroundings clearly, the boy utilises other sensory modalities. This deeply synaesthetic perception process is clearly visible not only at the beginning of the novel but also at the end of Chapter I when Stephen leaves the rector’s office and observes his friends playing cricket: “The fellows were practising long shies and bowling lobs and slow twisters. In the soft grey silence he could hear the bump of the balls: and from here and from there through the quiet air the sound of the cricket bats: pick, pack, pock, puck: like drops of water in a fountain falling softly in the brimming bowl” (Joyce, *Portrait* 61). Interestingly,

Joyce bookends the first chapter of the novel with a multisensory description of the environment as seen through Stephen's eyes. This choice emphasises the important role of sensory perception in the young boy's personal and artistic development. As a baby, Stephen perceived the world in a very whimsical and dynamic manner. As an older boy, he is already able to focus and dwell on one aspect of the situation, such as "the sound of the cricket bats" in this scene. He also uses visual and tactile adjectives to describe silence, revealing more and more refinement of his perceptive skills: "in the soft grey silence." Stephen's perception becomes multi-modal, so he is able to describe something as abstract as silence using adjectives normally used to describe tangible objects. Examining *Dubliners* (1914), M. W. Murphy suggests that one of the reasons Joyce talks about darkness in the stories is his own problems with eyesight (99). Using Stephen as his literary surrogate, the novelist attempts to share how his perception is impaired by myopia. According to Robert Volpicelli, Stephen's myopia gives rise to a "narrative mode of directionless sensory-aesthetic wandering" (72). In other words, Joyce conveys to the reader a sense of dynamic multisensory influx which constitutes an integral part of both his own and Stephen's development as an artist. The idea of "seeing the world with one's eyes closed" appears also in the "Proteus" episode of *Ulysses* (1922) in Stephen's stream of consciousness: "Shut your eyes and see" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 31). The *Ulysses* Stephen experiments with his senses to explore how differently one can perceive the world with one's eyes closed. Similarly, the *Portrait* Stephen, bombarded with numerous and varied sensory impressions, learns how to indulge deeply not only in images but also in feelings, smells and sounds.⁷

⁷ This *Portrait* passage anticipates *To the Lighthouse* section which describes Mrs. Ramsay's experience of her house and the surrounding area: "[T]he men were happily talking; this sound which had lasted now half an hour and had taken its place soothingly in the scale of sounds pressing on top of her, such as the tap of ball upon bats, the sharp, sudden bark now and then, 'How's that? How's that?' of the children playing cricket, had ceased; so that the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again" (Woolf, *TTL* 11-12). Miriam Clark describes Woolf's prose as "wave-like" and states that the "wave-patterns of the novel, like those formed by the

1.1.2 Ideational learning and language acquisition

Aside from sensory perception, language constitutes another important source of inspiration for young Stephen. According to Koffka, language plays a crucial role in the development of an individual's thought processes. At first, children use language merely to express their wishes and emotions. Once they learn to relate "the word to the thing," they become more preoccupied with naming the material world rather than with their emotional state. Koffka calls this process of associating names with objects ideational learning and claims that "the ascription of a name will prepare the way for a further organization of the thing's attributes" (*The Growth of the Mind* 343). Naming the already existing configurations (gestalts) helps the child understand their nature, and thus make sense of the surrounding world. A seemingly stable and universal attribute of all existing objects, name might become "the most pronounced character of the thing," meaning that it defines what the object is to the child (Koffka, *The Growth of the Mind* 343). The importance of language is especially crucial in Stephen's case because he aspires to become a poet, an artist whose building blocks are words. Especially in the opening chapter of the novel, Stephen contemplates the meaning of many words, trying to understand the implications and functions of language. The boy's linguistic development parallels Joyce's attempts at language play in his later novels. According to Margot Norris, in *Finnegans Wake* (1939) "words and images can mean several, often contradictory, things at once" (120). Thus, Stephen's linguistic explorations in *Portrait* seem to constitute a clear family resemblance to the novelist's description of his own journey as a writer.

diffracted light of physics, represent whole and potent modes of seeing and hearing, thinking and acting," which also recalls forms of vitality (416).

Interestingly, Stephen incorporates sensory perception into the process of language acquisition. One of the first words that he considers is “suck.” While spending time on the playground, the boy overhears one of his friends using the word “suck,” and then starts to analyse the effect which this word exerts on different senses:

—We all know why you speak. You are McGlade’s suck.

Suck was a queer word. The fellow called Simon Moonan that name because Simon Moonan used to tie the prefect’s false sleeves behind his back and the prefect used to let on to be angry. But the sound was ugly. Once he had washed his hands in the lavatory of the Wicklow Hotel and his father pulled the stopper up by the chain after and the dirty water went down through the hole in the basin. And when it had all gone down slowly the hole in the basin had made a sound like that: suck. Only louder (Joyce, *Portrait* 8).

Peters correctly notices that *Portrait*’s first chapter focuses on the impact particular words have on the senses and experiments with the effects certain sounds have on human sensory perception (44). The above-quoted passage features mainly the senses of sight and hearing. Stephen builds the gestalt of “suck” by connecting the sound of this word to the visual images of objects that make a “sucking” sound: “And when it had all gone down slowly the hole in the basin had made a sound like that: suck.” He also considers the alternative, slang definition of this word, meaning sycophant (“suck,” n.10). Even though Stephen knows the sucking sound and fathoms what it means to be a sycophant, acquiring a new word to name these concepts takes his understanding one step further. As R. B. Kershner observes, “Stephen begins to learn to allow a dialogue between the alien language that surrounds him and his own generative power” (“The Artist as Text” 884). Now when he has a gestalt of the name composed, he can incorporate it into his speech and create his own narrative around the word “suck.”

Stephen considers not only words accidentally overheard on the playground, but also the names of different geographical locations. While studying his geography textbook, the boy composes a gestalt of his identity and posits himself at the centre of his own world. He does so by relating specific nouns to places that he recognises from the map or simply from his immediate surroundings:

Still they were all different places that had different names. They were all in different countries and the countries were in continents and the continents were in the world and the world was in the universe.

He turned to the flyleaf of the geography and read what he had written there: himself, his name and where he was.

Stephen Dedalus

Class of Elements

Clongowes Wood College

Sallins

County Kildare

Ireland

Europe

The World

The Universe (Joyce, *Portrait* 12).

It is important to acknowledge that naming the places in which he belongs constitutes one of Stephen's first compositions. Once the boy realises how multifarious and vast the world is, he tries to make sense of it through poetry: "Still they were all different places that had different names." Instead of feeling overwhelmed by his discovery, Stephen harnesses that wonder via a creative process. He feels confident about his identity; so confident that he puts his own name at the top of the list. Marguerite Harkness calls Stephen's hierarchy "a satisfying lie"

because “it places Stephen at the head of the universe” and “makes sense out of the various scholastic and civil authorities he is aware of” (25). In a sense, this gestalt which Stephen composes around his identity and national belonging is a simplified, artificially imposed image, soon to be shaken by the political discussion he overhears during Christmas dinner. Now, however, it helps Stephen to grasp the world’s complexities. The boy once again becomes a creator of his own reality. As Harkness notices, the boy places himself “at the head of the universe,” assuming a certain degree of control over his surroundings.

Instances of ideational learning occur also when Stephen tries to fathom his Christian faith as well as God’s linguistic omnipresence. The boy’s religious reflections are especially evident when he contemplates God’s name and its counterparts in other languages:

God was God’s name just as his name was Stephen. Dieu was the French for God and that was God’s name too; and when anyone prayed to God and said Dieu then God knew at once that it was a French person that was praying. But though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages still God remained always the same God and God’s real name was God (Joyce, *Portrait* 13).

Most importantly, Stephen realises that English is not the only language used to refer to God. He is aware of God’s omnipresence despite linguistic differences: “(...) there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages.” At the same time, the last sentence of the passage suggests Stephen’s dogmatic belief that “God’s real name was God.” As Quigley claims, “God provides firm footing in the realm of language” (*Modernist Fiction* 121). It is difficult for the young boy to grasp that God’s name is not unchanging like his own name. At first, he seems to acknowledge the complexity, but in the end, he comes back to a simplistic understanding of the Creator. As mentioned before, the name defines what the object is to the

child. That is why, even though there are many different words to refer to God, Stephen decides to stick to the one that feels most familiar to him. In a sense, his choice of the noun constitutes an active attempt to construct a narrative around his life. According to Quigley, only later in the novel, does Stephen realise that “English is not unquestionably his right language” (*Modernist Fiction* 121). For now, however, it helps him organise his ideas (gestalts) and understand his religion.⁸

Besides relating names to specific locations, objects or ideas, Stephen endeavours to grasp symbolic language too. He does so by applying metaphorical expressions to concrete entities which he experiences with his senses in daily life. When the boy overhears the terms “tower of ivory” and “house of gold” from the Catholic Litany of the Blessed Virgin, he tries to understand how they can be used to describe a woman:

Tower of Ivory, they used to say, House of Gold! How could a woman be a tower of ivory or a house of gold? [...] Eileen had long white hands. One evening when playing tig she had put her hands over his eyes: long and white and thin and cold and soft. That was ivory: a cold white thing. That was the meaning of Tower of Ivory”
(Joyce, *Portrait* 35)

According to Kershner, “Stephen finds it difficult to cope with the mystic power of words to transcend language,” implying that the boy struggles to go beyond literalism (“Time and Language” 608). Ivory is a white material, so it is easy for Stephen to compare it to Eileen’s similarly cool and pale hands: “long and white and thin and cold and soft.” In Koffka’s terms, Stephen relates “tower of ivory” to his gestalt of Eileen; a gestalt which he constructs from

⁸ For Stephen, linguistic diversity is of utmost significance, especially later in the book. During the well-known conversation with the Dean of Studies, an Englishman, Stephen becomes especially conscious of his Irish heritage, noticing the differences between the Irish and English languages: Dean uses the English word “funnel” instead of “tundish” (Joyce, *Portrait* 204). As Sean Golden points out, “Stephen, who prides himself on his literary knowledge, has been caught not knowing a common English word. The dean has never heard the word still commonly used in Ireland” (11). Insecure about his linguistic abilities, Stephen calls English (the Dean of Studies’ language) “his own”, which signifies how deeply he feels his otherness. The fact that the boy comes back to this conversation in his journal only shows what an important moment of realisation this was for him.

such sensory impressions. This initial learning experience, though still rooted in material reality, helps him develop a deeper understanding in future that goes beyond the literal. Kershner notices that Stephen already “comprehends intuitively” that the Litany is notably metaphorical (“Time and Language” 608). It seems to be the boy’s conscious choice to interpret this religious language subjectively, using his perceptual skills. As his mind develops, he will be able to understand how “tower of ivory” can figuratively describe the spiritual existence of Virgin Mary. And this understanding will constitute another early step towards mastery of poetic language.⁹

1.2. “Ego-world field” and religion in Stephen’s villanelle

As previously discussed, gestalt emphasises the subjectivity of perception: subjectivity associated with the observer’s personality and emotional state. Human perception “internalizes” objects, and it is this internalisation that gestalt psychology emphasises most (Tonder and Spehar 409). As previously discussed, Koffka explains the relationship between the observer and the object by introducing the idea of the “ego-world field.” Following this theory, Stephen’s cultural milieu affects his perception, and thus influences the gestalt of reality that he forms. B. S. Heusel uses a different gestalt concept to show how Stephen’s perception is influenced by cultural and religious dogmas: namely, the figure/ground principle (see Chapter I). Drawing from Maurice Beebe, she suggests that the figure of Stephen is accentuated, especially in the beginning of the novel when his cultural background has not yet distorted his perception. However, as time goes by, the background becomes more and more important, engulfing Stephen’s individuality: “Joyce’s approach at first is like that of ‘the impressionist painters [...] vivid details [...] momentarily accentuated against a moving blur of undelineated background.’ Later, however, his approach becomes postimpressionistic: the cultural milieu is absorbed by the young man Stephen, and symbols

⁹ See White on the topic of the intersection of Joyce’s writing with the philosophy of language.

of cultural background actually begin to compete with the figure for attention” (181).

Growing increasingly aware of these cultural influences, Stephen becomes hesitant of them and strives for intellectual independence. The struggle, however, turns out to be Herculean because the boy’s mind ceaselessly intermingles cultural and religious doctrines with artistic ambitions, causing him to go round in circles: rebelling against and then returning to those familiar dogmatic beliefs.

Religion exerts a major hold on Stephen’s creative development. Because the Catholic Church portrays sensual exploration as a sinful act, the boy feels guilty to indulge in sensory impressions which, in turn, inhibits his artistic creativity. Associating sensory perception with sexual activities, Stephen decides to mortify his senses after he confesses to sex with a prostitute. In Koffka’s terms, Stephen does not let the perceived objects dominate his ego, and his gestalts become dominated by the religious and cultural ideas which surround him. In Chapter III, the narrator states that “the eyes see the thing, without having wished first to see” (Joyce, *Portrait* 151). Instead of letting the immediate sensory impressions impact his perception, Stephen tries to gain control over his senses to prevent himself from committing a sinful act:

Each of his senses was brought under a rigorous discipline. In order to mortify the sense of sight he made it his rule to walk in the street with downcast eyes. [...] To mortify his hearing he exerted no control over his voice which was then breaking, neither sang nor whistled, and made no attempt to flee from noises which caused him painful nervous irritation [...]. To mortify his smell was more difficult as he found in himself no instinctive repugnance to bad odours [...] To mortify the taste he practised strict habits at table, observed to the letter all the fasts of the church and sought by distraction to divert his mind from the savours of different foods. But it was to the mortification of touch he brought the most assiduous ingenuity of inventiveness. He

never consciously changed his position in bed, sat in the most uncomfortable positions, suffered patiently every itch and pain, kept away from the fire, remained on his knees all through the mass except at the gospels [...] (Joyce, *Portrait* 162-163).

Stephen's perception here is significantly altered by Catholic teachings that aim to discipline the body. Although Jean-Michel Rabaté argues that "Joyce presents these renunciatory experiments in a decadent literary mode indicating the extent to which Stephen's project is aesthetic rather than pious," Stephen's actions are still driven mainly by his guilty conscience (316). Even the strategies he adopts to mortify his senses are deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition, such as kneeling through the mass or observing the fasts. The boy does not allow his body to experience any sensual pleasure and tries to avoid any accidental sensory impressions. Interestingly, he also avoids self-expression in that he does not sing or whistle which is the opposite of what an artistic instinct could suggest. Such strict discipline stands in strong contrast with his attitude in the first chapter of the novel when baby Stephen lets himself be overcome with multifarious impressions. Even though he still exposes himself to painful experiences, he strictly controls them, for example by sitting in uncomfortable positions. Mortification of spontaneous sensory impressions hinders free experience which, in turn, leads to decreased creativity and independent thinking.

Stephen's attitude towards religion could also be explained using William James' ideas presented in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). In Lecture VIII entitled "The Divided Self, and the Process of its Unification," James suggests that there are two conflicting selves within one individual which need to unify to achieve internal harmony: "[...] a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency" (181). James also claims that "to find religion is only one out of many ways of reaching unity; and the process of remedying inner incompleteness [...] is a general psychological process" (181). He adds that inner harmony can also be achieved by devotion

to other passions, for example art (181). In Stephen's case, the "two conflicting selves" constitute religious ideas and free artistic thinking. While before he might have been able to find internal peace in Catholicism, now he realises that religion is not enough to remedy the feeling of incompleteness. In the hope of achieving the balance, he tries to pursue his artistic intuition. James' idea accords with gestalt psychology and its concept of fragmented reality. Gert van Tonder and Branka Spehar believe that good gestalt is characterised by internal balance: "In a good Gestalt, internal stresses are solved through a self-limiting set of hierarchical rules, resulting in a unity in which all forces are internally balanced, with each part appearing in the right place due to the demands issuing from within the Gestalt, not from the outside" (410). The tension between Stephen's artistic self which wants to indulge in sensory exploration and Stephen's religious self which incites guilty conscience does not let the boy compose a unified gestalt of his identity. As Tonder and Spehar claim, the whole comes from "the demands issuing from within the Gestalt, not from outside," while in Stephen's case the demands come partially from the outside world of religious and social expectations. His artistic inclination is constantly challenged by these outside forces that create tensions and thus disturb the unity of the boy's identity. The prime example of Stephen's internal fragmentation is his first attempt at poetry, "Villanelle of the Temptress." At first sight, the villanelle seems to be the fruit of Stephen's sexual passion and sensual understanding of desire. Setting his lust free through a highly eroticised poem, Stephen takes a step towards turning into an independent artist, released from the chains of religious dogma. However, when one takes a closer look at Stephen's thought process, it becomes clear that the boy is still heavily influenced by his Catholic upbringing. The narrator describes the force which inspired Stephen to write the poem as a "spirit filling him pure as the purest water" (Joyce, *Portrait* 235). According to Beryl Schlossman, "Stephen's elaboration of the villanelle becomes part of the paschal celebration focused on the Holy Saturday benediction

of fire and water (xxiv).” “The purest water” image also recalls the sacrament of Baptism which sets infants free from original sin. By that line of thinking, Stephen implies that his poem is, in fact, not a release for or from his sexual desire but rather a quasi-religious purification of his artistic soul. James writes that “if the individual be of tender conscience and religiously quickened, the unhappiness will take form of moral remorse” (176). The boy still feels profound guilt and shame associated with his sensuality. Even though he perceives the world with his body and the impressions evoke emotional reactions in him, (“O what sweet music! His soul was all dewy wet. Over his limbs in sleep pale cool waves of light had passed.”), he interprets these experiences in a religious manner (Joyce, *Portrait* 235).¹⁰ Once again, Stephen tries to gain control over his sensory perception; however, this time instead of mortifying his senses, he explains his reaction using a Catholic narrative.

The narrator takes Christian imagery even further and claims that Stephen’s inspiration comes from God itself – “seraphim themselves were breathing upon him” – suggesting Stephen’s belief that his poetic talent is a gift from heaven rather than the result of an active creative process (Joyce, *Portrait* 235). This comparison raises doubts about whether Stephen truly exercises artistic freedom while writing his villanelle. The boy seems to lack the confidence that would allow him to believe that he is actively engaged in the writing process. According to Robert Scholes, “the narrator has established a parallel between artistic creation and the divine begetting of the Son of God,” even further reiterating Stephen’s passivity (486). The boy compares the writing process to the “virgin womb of imagination,” in which “the word was made flesh” (Joyce, *Portrait* 236). In other words, he believes his villanelle comes into being in the same way as Jesus Christ came to Earth through the Virgin Mary’s womb. Assuming the feminine role of the Virgin Mary, who involuntarily becomes

¹⁰ Interestingly, Joyce himself often used Catholic nomenclature in his private writing. For example, in a letter to his brother written in 1906, he says “I like the notion of the Holy Ghost being stuck in the ink-bottle” (“To Stanislaus Joyce” 100).

God's mother, Stephen portrays his inspiration as fulfilling God's will. Therefore, the religious background influences the boy's perception, predominating over his sense of individuality and affecting his gestalt of artistic process.

One could, however, interpret Stephen's writing differently: not as God's gift, but rather as Stephen trying to assume the role of God the Creator.¹¹ In that sense, one could argue that religion, in fact, helps Stephen develop creatively: he re-defines the religious dogmas to march his artistic needs. The boy perceives himself as a maker, constructing a discrete world of imagination. In line with this understanding, Stephen does not play the passive role of a receiver and carrier of the "virgin womb of imagination;" on the contrary, he is the one who changes the visions into "flesh." Even though Stephen might believe that his inspiration comes from God, he is still the one who composes the poem. Referring to writing poetry, he uses the expression, "transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (Joyce, *Portrait* 240). Interestingly, the narrator uses the word "transmute" instead of the more traditionally Catholic verb "to transubstantiate." As Robert Boyle explains, the word "transmuting" comes from an alchemical tradition and provides the doer with more independence than "transubstantiating," which requires God's action (47). This shift in vocabulary is yet another sign that Stephen's struggle might not be in vain, and that he possibly moves forward in his development.¹² By not fully depending on God's helping hand, Stephen becomes more and more independent in his artistic endeavours, even if

¹¹ Many critics of Anglophone literary modernism have explored the idea of the writer as a godly figure. In fact, Virginia Woolf herself said in the early manuscript of *The Waves*: "I am the thing in which all exists," clearly comparing herself to God (qtd. in Olson 342). For more extensive critical analyses of this aspect of modernist writing, see Culler and Olson.

¹² As Kern suggests, "Stephen announces in *Portrait* that as an artist he will secularise the spirit of Catholicism," suggesting the boy's heresy (*Modernism After the Death of God* 47). This heretical attitude might signify his rebellious attitude towards religion and thus his striving for intellectual independence. It can, however, also imply Stephen's incessant overreliance on religion: by "secularising the spirit of Catholicism," he indirectly acknowledges its existence and imaginative power.

this process proceeds slowly. The narrator clearly indicates that the verses originate in the boy's mind: "The verses passed from his mind to his lips and, murmuring them over, he felt the rhythmic movement of a villanelle pass through them" (Joyce, *Portrait* 236). The mention of "the rhythmic movement" also indicates that Stephen can perceive forms of vitality, an ability which he exhibited as an infant. Doris Wight argues that, while writing the villanelle, "the young man has, in fact, undergone a needed passage from passive to active creation and has become a conscious creator able to play the vigorous part needed if he is to live successfully the life of a mature artist" (216). Whether Stephen permanently turns into "a conscious creator" is questionable. Even if as the creator he assumes a more active role, his Catholic upbringing still deeply affects the boy. Stephen Kern suggests that "Stephen announces in *Portrait* that as an artist he will secularise the spirit of Catholicism" (*Modernism After the Death of God* 47). This heretical attitude might signify his rebellious attitude towards religion and his struggle for intellectual independence. It can, however, also indicate Stephen's incessant reliance on religion: by "secularising the spirit of Catholicism," he indirectly acknowledges its existence. Yes, Stephen uses "transmuting" instead of "transubstantiating," but he still does not fully discard Catholic imagery. The tension arising from the vagueness of the narrator's descriptions undoubtedly emphasises the sense of Stephen's internal fragmentation.

Stephen also reveals the tension between his conflicting selves when he attempts to define himself as the author of the poem. The problem is that while trying to compose a gestalt of his identity, he once again entangles himself in Catholic tradition, images and nomenclature, letting them dominate his perception. Instead of referring to himself as an artist or a poet, Stephen claims to be "a priest of eternal imagination" (Joyce, *Portrait* 240). However, Stephen changes the Catholic understanding of priesthood: "a priest of eternal imagination" does not serve God but art. This becomes clear when we look at how Joyce

changes the Jesuit motto (“for the greater glory of God”) in an epigraph of the novel (Höpfel 59). In line with the Jesuit motto Stephen should utilise his skills to glorify God, but instead the boy decides to “apply his mind to the obscure arts” (Joyce, *Portrait* 1). His aim is thus not to understand religious dogmas, but to create and understand art. As a “priest of eternal imagination,” Stephen glorifies his own creativity and becomes aware of his own maverick insight.

While considering Stephen’s identity as “a priest of eternal imagination,” it is also important to consider what he understands by priesthood, where once again Stephen’s re-definition of religious principles comes into play. Catholic ideas do not define the gestalt of priesthood for the boy which suggests that the gestalt of Stephen’s thinking remains partially independent of outside influences. Earlier in the novel, Stephen reveals that he sees priesthood in a rather unconventional and almost heretic way. In Chapter IV, the narrator claims that Stephen’s desire to become a priest stems from his wish to learn people’s darkest secrets and possess “secret power” seemingly reserved only for religious leaders: “He would hold his secret knowledge and secret power, being as sinless as the innocent, and he would be a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedec” (Joyce, *Portrait* 173). Thus, the boy does not associate priesthood with commitment to God but rather with special occult abilities which, he believes, ordinary people lack. Becoming a priest would allow him to get as close to sin as possible, at the same time letting him remain innocent: “as sinless as the innocent.” While normally priesthood entails serving others, Stephen sees it in a completely self-serving way, as a privilege that would help him avoid guilty conscience set him apart from the majority.

Stephen’s definition of priesthood, however, entails more obstacles than the Catholic priesthood does. Farrell believes that by becoming the “priest of eternal imagination,” Stephen enters the never-ending circle of creation, in which he does not finish any work of

art. By contrast, being a Catholic priest provides a feeling of stability because it offers a clear view of how his life would look until death (Farrell 38-39). Becoming an artist and redefining priesthood for his own needs, Stephen abandons a life lived according to religious doctrines in favour of this more complex existence. He agrees that creating art is a process which will never fully conclude. As a writer, he will experience multiple deaths and rebirths associated with the process of continual creation. Having made such a decision, Stephen proves he is not yet a lost cause, and that he gradually continues the struggle to slip away from the Catholic grasp.

While the process of writing the villanelle reveals certain tensions within Stephen, the villanelle itself constitutes a perfect embodiment of these. First and foremost, Stephen's decision to compose a villanelle is a curious one, as it reveals his lack of creative freedom. The villanelle is a notably fixed poetic form whose authors must follow strict rules associated with the number of stanzas and rhyme structure. Using Tonder and Spehar's idea of a good gestalt, the demands of the villanelle come from outside rather than from inside Stephen's mind, which makes the poem unbalanced and fractured. A villanelle is also based on refrains or, in other words, repetitions (Lennard 52). According to John Hollander, "repeating something often may make it *more trivial* – because more expected and therefore carrying less information [...] or, because of shifting and developing context in each stanza preceding, *more important*" (38). In the case of Stephen's poem, the former is probably true because no new information is introduced via the refrains, ("Are you not weary of ardent ways?" and "Tell no more of enchanted days") and, most importantly, Stephen's creativity is not challenged (Joyce, *Portrait* 242-243). Even though Bing Dong believes the villanelle to be a sign of Stephen's artistic maturity (due to the poem's phonological, grammatical and lexical complexity), I argue that the villanelle in fact constitutes a safer option (101). Instead of contriving his own independent artistic template, Stephen decides to adhere to a familiar

model with established rules. As Robert Adams Day observes, “by the time *A Portrait* appeared [the villanelle] had already become [...] wearily conventional and thoroughly exhausted,” signifying that Joyce himself likely chose the metrical form to show Stephen’s mental rigidity and lack of artistic adventurousness (77-78). The poem thus reveals the boy’s still unbalanced gestalt of artistic identity, whose wholeness comes from artificially established rules rather than his own ideas.

Villanelle is full of ambivalent terms which reveal further tensions between parts of Stephen’s identity. It describes the boy’s sexual desire towards girl E.C. (Emma Clery) in terms of Catholic nomenclature and thus shows that the boy’s perception is still suffused with Jesuit teachings. Stephen seems to focus on the girl’s physicality, enumerating her “lavish limb” and “languorous look” (Joyce, *Portrait* 243). His sexual desire is also evident in the repetitive use of the adjective “ardent,” emphasising the boy’s powerful lust (Joyce, *Portrait* 242). Interestingly, “ardent” can be understood not only as “passionate,” but also as “burning” (“Ardent,” adj. 1 and 2). Especially considering other infernal words in the villanelle (“ablaze,” “flame,” and “smoke”), such interpretation of “ardent” recalls the Catholic portrayal of hell (Joyce, *Portrait* 242-243). In addition, Stephen addresses his poetic interlocutor with the question “are you not weary of ardent ways,” suggesting that he might still be scared of committing the sin of impurity (Joyce, *Portrait* 42). James suggests that there is “conviction of sin” associated with religions, leading people to believe that they are sinful beings (176). Even though only a few pages later, Stephen refuses to take Communion and declares the famous “I will not serve,” leading the reader to believe that he is free of the Church’s influence, the poem unveils his true state of mind and the fear that he unconsciously bears (Joyce, *Portrait* 268). Hélène Cixous suggests that Stephen is “always the product of the Church and of its system of threats and reward. The Church [...] imposes its own vision upon Stephen” (76). It is hard not to agree with Cixous’ statement, taking a closer look at the

villanelle. For example, the phrase “fallen seraphim” shows Stephen’s internal conflicts by referring to both his Catholic education and artistic ambitions. As Mark Singleton argues, “the fallen seraphim represent the celestial image of the poet himself who can only create through an incessantly and eternally affirmed movement of loss, a sacrifice that claims no dividend” (308). On the one hand, Stephen tries to show that he breaks free of Catholic influence: like the seraphim, he decides to abandon doctrine, and thus to sacrifice the peace of mind associated with Christian faith. On the other hand, using angelic imagery, Stephen still decides to employ religious language which reveals that Catholic iconography still affects his thinking. This ambivalence reveals certain key paradoxes in Stephen’s struggle for artistic identity: even though the boy seems to pride himself on leaving the Church and being a sinner, he inadvertently admits that he believes in the existence of sin, and thus also God.

1.3 Closure principle in Stephen’s diary

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man ends with Stephen’s diary which, as Michael Levenson suggests, constitutes “an assertion of individuality and a repudiation of public norms” (1018). Because it is the first time in the novel that we are presented with first-person narrative, the diary is the peak of his artistic development. However, some scholars (for example, Edward Garnett and D.P. Rando) disagree with this perspective, claiming the diary to be anticlimactic. Explaining his decision not to publish *Portrait*, Edward Garnett, editor at Duckworth Books, wrote: “And at the end of the book there is a complete falling to bits; the pieces of writing and the thoughts are all in pieces and they fall like damp, ineffective rockets” (qtd. in Ellman 404). In gestalt terms, “a complete falling to bits” signifies an incomplete, fractured gestalt which suggests that the personality of the author is similarly incomplete and fractured. This incompleteness goes against the closure and continuation of gestalt principles according to which the mind tends to perceive complete forms and

continuous paths. It also defies the purpose behind the traditional *Bildungsroman*, which is supposed to show the main character's complete and continuous developmental path; instead, it presents a fragmented character development, typical of the modernist *Künstlerroman*. As previously quoted, Levenson states "the *Bildungsroman* presupposes some principle of development, which in turn presupposes some concept of an end" (1021). Joyce's novel thus goes against this literary tradition by showing Stephen's failed artistic development through the fragmented and inconsistent diary entries. Rando suggests that "while the *Künstlerroman* may give readers a desire for the new masterpiece, it cannot quite satisfy them with the new masterpiece *itself*" (49). Even though Stephen seemingly finds his individual voice and commits his life to art ("Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead"), the reader does not see him leaving or finishing his first work of art but rather endlessly preparing to do so (Joyce, *Portrait* 276).¹³ The tensions between the external demands of religion and internal pursuit of artistic freedom, which Stephen incessantly experiences, prevent the gestalt of his identity from achieving balance between different fragments, and thus reaching closure. The diary section is therefore what makes the novel *Künstlerroman*; it contravenes the traditional *Bildungsroman* in that the character's gestalt never feels fully finished.

One of the first diary entries shows how scattered and influenced by religion Stephen's thoughts already are, preventing developmental closure. On 21st March Stephen writes: "Free. Soul free and fancy free. Let the dead bury the dead. Ay. And let the dead marry the dead" (Joyce, *Portrait* 270). Firstly, it is questionable whether somebody who really is free would need to state this fact. According to Levenson, "Stephen's intention to

¹³ During his conversation with Cranly, Stephen confesses his resolution to break free from the institutions in which he was raised: "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can [...]" (Joyce, *Portrait* 269).

break with the past is evident, but that intention, restated from day to day, acquires a past of its own [...]” (1020). To emphasise his freedom and independence, Stephen repeats the adjective “free” three times. At the same time, he finishes the diary entry with a biblical quote from the Book of Matthew: “And let the dead bury the dead.” Jesus’ words are supposed to encourage us not to focus on the past but to focus on the future (Manser and Pickering 220). Though such interpretation of the quote would signify Stephen’s readiness to break free from the past and leave his family, the fact that he uses biblical quotes puts the boy’s intellectual independence into question. He changes the quote slightly saying, “let the dead marry the dead,” but the inspiration still comes from the Bible. Stephen’s mind continues to be saturated with the religious ideas he learned from the Jesuits. Stephen states later that “the past is consumed in the present [...]” meaning that it is impossible to relinquish one’s background fully. The demands of the environment will affect the development of his identity by exacerbating the tension between social expectations and Stephen’s individual needs.

The following diary entries further emphasise the incomplete and fragmented nature of Stephen’s identity. The 24th March entry, for example, reveals Stephen’s latent preoccupation with religious themes and his view of himself as a Catholic. It describes the boy’s conversation with his mother during which he ponders how he feels about both his own faith and about Catholic doctrine prioritising Holy Trinity over Holy Family:

Began with a discussion with my mother. Subject: B.V.M. [...] To escape held up relations between Jesus and Papa against those between Mary and her son. Said religion was not a lying-in hospital. Mother indulgent. Said I have a queer mind and have read too much. Not true. Have read little and understood less. Then she said I would come back to faith because I had a restless mind. This means to leave church by backdoor of sin and re-enter through the skylight of repentance. Cannot repent (Joyce, *Portrait* 271).

Even purely on the syntactical level, it is clear Stephen's writing breaks down into fragments where he omits the subject or the predicates of the sentences: "Mother indulgent [...] Not true. Have read little and understood less." This fragmentation underscores the lack of internal artistic harmony that Stephen experiences while reflecting on religion. The external tensions arising from Stephen's Catholic upbringing keep exerting pressure on his perception and shatter the whole of his identity, preventing it from reaching a harmonious balance, a characteristic of good *gestalts*. The boy's need to engage in conversations about Catholic beliefs is telling because it shows that the boy's mind keeps coming back to religious doctrines: "relations between Jesus and Papa against those between Mary and her son." His thoughts on the Holy Trinity, in fact, reappear in *Ulysses* when he uses the idea to explain Shakespeare's Hamlet: "He Who Himself begot middler the Holy Ghost and Himself sent Himself" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 162). Using Catholic doctrines to explain aesthetic or artistic views undoubtedly shows that, whether or not Stephen wants them to, Catholic ideas continue to exert substantial influence on his perception. At the same time, the boy insists that he would not repent and would not come back to faith. While he sounds steadfast in his opinion, repeating it so often makes the reader question its authenticity. Just like in the case of the word "free," Stephen sounds as if he were trying to force himself into disbelief. Furthermore, he says, "Cannot repent," thus assuming that there is something to repent; and if in his opinion there really is no God, there is also no need to even think about repenting. Stephen's self is divided, and thus the *gestalt* of his identity remains unbalanced and disharmonious.

The last three journal entries raise more doubts about Stephen's departure from external influences and the beginning of his artistic journey. Even though the boy experiences an epiphany during which he feels compelled to commit his life to art, what follows makes the reader grow suspicious of its authenticity. The 16th April entry is ecstatic, describing Stephen's excitement about the coming adventures and leaving the past behind in an

ornamental and pompous language: “The spell of arms and voices: the white arms of roads, their promise of close embraces and the black arms of tall ships that stand against the moon, their tale of distant nations” (Joyce, *Portrait* 275). The 26th April entry, however, begins with Stephen’s mother “putting his clothes in order,” which brings the reader back to Stephen’s actual experience (Joyce, *Portrait* 275). Even if he already imagines himself to be a mature artist, he still needs his mother’s help with something as trivial as packing his clothes. Finally, the boy refers to the mythical Greek inventor Daedalus in the last entry, calling him his father: “Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead” (Joyce, *Portrait* 276). Even though it might seem that Stephen’s referring to Daedalus as his real father (instead of referring to his biological father or God) is a sign of artistic maturity, the syntax of the exclamation resembles that of Catholic prayers, once again pointing towards Stephen’s religion-skewed perception. Most importantly, though, is it the exclamation, and not the departure itself that ends the novel. The reader does not see Stephen leaving his house, which means that the gestalt of his identity does not reach the internal balance and remains incomplete. Kevin Farrell claims that “by becoming a priest of the eternal imagination, he [Stephen] enters a continuing cycle, one that cannot culminate in any single process of aesthetic transubstantiation,” signifying that the final closure is impossible to attain (38-39). Although Stephen’s mind remains under the influence of religion, his artistry is defined by a constant struggle to achieve balance between the fragments of his identity: those representing religion and those representing its repudiation.

Conclusion

Growing up, Stephen slowly becomes aware of the tensions that exist within his identity. The never-ending struggle between the external demands of society and his own individuality means the fragments never come together into a balanced whole. The gestalt of his artistic identity is dynamic, defined by constant change with either religion or artistry

dominating interchangeably. Joyce said that “[he] cannot express [himself] in English without enclosing [himself] in a tradition,” suggesting that, just like his literary surrogate, the author struggled with finding his individual voice, independent of the social environment in which he was raised (qtd. in Ellman 397). And the importance of that struggle is what *Künstlerroman* emphasises. This lack of balance in the end result, whether it is a gestalt of identity, a gestalt of a poem or just a gestalt of a single concept, defines the fragmented nature of a modernist artist who continuously needs to pick up the pieces to construct new wholes of himself and his artistry.

Gestalt psychology and gestalt-inspired theories of perception help us understand the fragmentary character development of modernist *Künstlerroman*. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* describes how human perception evolves over time and how this evolution influences the growth of artistic identity. From a very young age, Stephen gathers sensory impressions, allowing himself to indulge in synaesthetic explorations. Combining information from different senses, he composes gestalts which not only help him understand his immediate world but also activate his imaginative powers. However, the tension between his internal need for sensuality and cultural pressures prevents Stephen from reaching perfectly balanced artistic maturity. Similar can be argued about Lily Briscoe from Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, who tries to compose her vision of Mrs Ramsay. While trying to finish her portrait, Lily realises her gestalt of the woman, just like Stephen’s identity, can never be perfectly balanced and will undergo constant changes.

CHAPTER 2

GESTALT READING OF ARTISTIC CREATIVITY: THE CASE OF LILY BRISCOE

One of the main contributions that gestalt theory brought to cognitive psychology is its shift in focus from object to process and from objective truth to subjective one (Woody and Viney 381). Gestalt theorists emphasize the interactive relationship between the perceiver and the object being perceived. Because of these interactions, gestalts are highly subjective formations that depend on individual differences and many other factors, such as past experience or emotions, elucidated by gestalt principles. Steven Lehar explains that what we observe is not the objective vision of the world, but rather our mental representation of the external environment:

The key insight of Gestalt theory is that when we view the world around us, what we see is not the world itself, but in fact it is primarily *a percept*, that is, an internal data structure active within the brain, *and only in secondary fashion is this data structure also similar in certain respects to external objects and surfaces*, just as an image on a television screen is first and foremost a pattern of glowing phosphor dots, and only in secondary fashion is it representative of a remote scene (Lehar 763).

In other words, the objective truth about the world is inaccessible: what we see constitutes our mind's creation rather than, as Lehar states, "the world itself." The connections between

gestalt's fragments as well as the fragments themselves vary from person to person or even within one individual, as the context changes.¹⁴ The subjectivity of perception thus made it reasonable for gestalt theorists to focus on the process of unifying the fragments rather than on highly variable, and thus elusive, end-results.

In this chapter, I will analyse the process of Lily's gestalt formation as it is portrayed in the first chapter of *To the Lighthouse*. I will focus on the process of Lily's gestalt formation and its evolution. When she goes for a walk with Mr. Bankes and observes the bay, the narrator emphasises the importance of completeness in perception: "[...]with a natural instinct to *complete the picture*, after this swift movement, both of them looked at the dunes far away, and instead of merriment felt come over them some sadness--because *the thing was completed partly*, and partly because distant views seem to outlast by a million years." The "natural instinct to complete the picture" and dissatisfaction with incompleteness is exactly what gestalt psychology emphasises. While Lily observes Mrs. Ramsay, she tries to complete her vision to be able to express it in the form of a painting. Putting the pieces together, she composes her own dynamic gestalt.

I will start the chapter by elucidating how Lily collects the disparate sensory impressions and combines them into smaller gestalt wholes that will later fuse into the final gestalt of her artistic vision. Then, I will proceed to analyse the roles of emotional valence, dynamics and intersubjectivity in Lily's perception of the Ramsays' house as epitomised by Mrs. Ramsay. The second sub-section will discuss the importance of human perception in the making sense of the external environment exemplified by Mrs. McNab's restoration works and Lily's return to the house. The last sub-section focuses on Lily's memory of Mrs.

¹⁴ The phenomenon of "gestalt-shift" occurs when one's perception of an object changes as one, for example, pays attention to a different aspect of the said object. One of the most illustrious examples of gestalt shift is the duck/rabbit Gestalt shift, which was famously discussed by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) (Crowe 1)

Ramsay and offers gestalt explanation of memory fallibility. The chapter ends with the discussion of expressing the gestalt on the canvas and crossing the boundary between internal and external gestalt existence.

2.1 Collecting impressions in “The Window”

2.1.1 From observation to perception: collecting impressions

Over the course of the novel, Lily gathers her sensory impressions of the Ramsays’ house in order to finish her painting. Each scene which describes Lily’s perception constitutes a separate gestalt, composed of information coming from different sensory modalities. These gestalts are isolated fragments of the final gestalt which Lily conflates to compose a multifaceted portrait of Mrs. Ramsay. Austrian philosopher Christian von Ehrenfels claims that the property of the whole disappears after it is broken down into fragments. He writes that “characteristic of Gestalt qualities is that they constitute a presentational content dependent upon yet distinguishable from their foundation” (96), implying that there is a major difference between the whole and its elements. Drawing upon another famous gestalt theorist Edwin Rausch, Barry Smith challenges Ehrenfels’ position and remarks that the fragments display their own “isolation properties” which depend on the context in which they exist: “Parts which have been subject to isolation may grow into unified wholes in their own right, or they may become merged into their new environment in such a way as to lose their properties of isolation. Wholes may come to manifest a high degree of inter-partial unity because their parts have grown together” (Smith 57). Following Smith’s reasoning, the disparate situations which Lily observes while staying at the Ramsays’ house are integral images on their own, growing into “unified wholes.” At the end of the novel, these wholes once again turn into fragments – fragments of Lily’s final gestalt, representing her experience of the Ramsays’ house epitomized by Mrs. Ramsay’s figure.

In the first passage featuring a description of Lily's perception and her attempts to paint, Woolf already refers to sensory exploration, specifically to vision. She makes an important distinction between "looking" and "seeing," and between the passive and active modes of perception that these words indicate. When Mr. Bankes joins Lily while she works on her painting, they notice Mr. Ramsay lost in his thoughts: "Mr. Ramsay glared at them. He glared at them without seeming to see them. That did make them both vaguely uncomfortable. Together they had seen a thing they had not been meant to see. They had encroached upon a privacy" (Woolf, *TTL* 14). John M. Findlay and Iain D. Gilchrist argue that the passive vision theories, in contrast to the active vision theories, assume that humans do not form a "proactive" relationship with the environment, but rather simply receive incoming information from it (Goodale 415). In the above-quoted paragraph, this difference is also visible on the level of semantics. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "to look" means "to direct one's sight, related senses," while "to see" means to "perceive with the eyes" ("look," v.1; "see," v.1).¹⁵ Seeing is thus not a passive action because it involves perceiving: the act of interpreting the image. That is why Mr. Ramsay does not register the existence of his observers, while Lily and Mr. Bankes seem to notice the immaterial side of the view: the side uncapturable to the eye. Seeing him talk to himself about his philosophical ideas, they invade his privacy: they perceive and fathom a part of Mr. Ramsay that he might not necessarily want to disclose. As Wendy Gan argues, Woolf believes that "there needs to be physical solitude to make privacy complete" (68). Mr. Ramsay's sinking into his mind is not enough to achieve full privacy because his physical self can still be observed, making his inner self prone to invasion.

¹⁵ In the passage, Woolf uses the verb "glare" rather than look (14, Woolf *To the Lighthouse*). *OED*, however, defines glare as a way of looking: "to look fixedly and fiercely" ("glare," v.2). That is why for the sake of clarity, I decided to examine the meaning behind the word "look," and not "glare."

This important difference between “seeing” and “looking” also plays a role in Lily’s artistic process: it underscores the disparity between passive observation and active perception, where the latter involves forming interpretative ideas of the visible images. In the first description of Lily’s artistic process (from her own perspective), Woolf uses the verb “look,” indicating that Lily is still only a passive observer of the environment that she wants to paint: “with all her senses quickened as they were, looking, straining, till the colour of the wall and the jackmanna beyond burnt into her eyes” (13). Lily does not yet interpret the wall and jackmanna’s colours but rather allows them to overcome her. Lily’s submerging in the image’s sensory impressions resembles Woolf’s observation of the fictional Mrs. Brown in her famous eponymous essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown:” “She sat in her corner opposite, very clean, very small, rather queer, and suffering intensely. The impression she made was overwhelming. It came pouring out like a draught, like a smell of burning” (Woolf, “Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown”). As Michael R. Schrimper notes, Lily is Woolf’s “literary surrogate;” they both let the person whom they want to portray overwhelm them with impressions before they form any conclusive ideas (38). The impressions are largely synaesthetic, affecting different sensory modalities, such as touch (“draught”) or smell (“smell of burning”). This multimodal quality makes it easier for both Lily and Woolf to construct their vision of a person.

Later in the discussed passage, Lily’s observations bear fruit, and she creates her own vision of the observed scene; a vision composed of visual sensations. Being aware of her newly-formed idea of the environment of the Ramsays’ house, the girl resolves to remain faithful to it rather than conform to the reality imposed on her by artistic convention.¹⁶

¹⁶ Lily’s violating convention and searching for her own mode of expression represents the shift between impressionist and post-impressionist ideas described by Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Chantal Lacourarie claims that “if light is the keyword for Impressionists, structure, framing, verticality are the corner-stones of Post-Impressionists” (75). Making the colours look pale, Lily would allow “the destruction of colour by light;” instead, she chooses to construct the shape through contrasting different colours (Lacourarie 75).

The jacmanna was bright violet; the wall staring white. *She would not have considered it honest to tamper with the bright violet and the staring white*, since she saw them like that, fashionable though it was, since Mr. Paunceforte's visit, to see everything pale, elegant, semi-transparent. Then beneath the colour there was the shape. She could see it all so clearly, so commandingly, when she looked [...] (Woolf, *TTL* 14)

Woolf uses the verb “see,” emphasizing that the jacmanna and the wall’s colours exist in Lily’s subjective reality. “Bright violet,” “staring white,” and the shape beneath them are fragments of her mental image that she combines to finish the painting. Lily is aware of how subjective her sensory perception is and understands that others may perceive certain colours differently. Even so, composing a “portrait of internal reality” remains of utmost importance to her (Heney 18). What is even more significant is that Lily starts to gradually gain control over her impressions. They do not overcome her anymore; rather, she assumes command over them, and this is when the artistic process begins. The initial influx of visual sensations remains the driving force behind this gestalt formation. As Schrimper notes, “prolonged observation gives rise to the quality of cognition necessary for the artist. Without these prolonged moments of observation, consciousness would be unrefined, rudimentary” (45). In other words, Lily’s senses enable her to look at the external world, but it is her brain (consciousness) that sorts the incoming information and gives rise to aesthetic judgment and artistic creation.

Woolf continues to emphasize the subjectivity of perception later in the passage. Going for a walk with Mr. Bankes and observing the colours of the bay (specifically red and blue), Lily notices that they look different depending on the surroundings. This observation

helps her grasp the Ramsays' essence which she hopes to convey in the painting. From Lily's perspective "the blue waters of the bay looked bluer than ever" through the break in the hedge "guarded by red hot poker" (Woolf, *TTL* 15). Red and blue are contrasting colours, with the former making the latter more vivid. This visual effect is explained by the figure/ground gestalt principle (see Chapter 1) and simultaneous contrast, which is a phenomenon describing two complementary colours intensifying each other (Ching 283). Lily uses this sensory impression to better understand the Ramsays. As Jack Stewart suggests, "in balancing her foreground and background colours, Woolf is also balancing the "psychological volumes," or in other words, characters' personalities (Stewart, "Colour in *TTL*" 447). With blue representing Mrs. Ramsay's tranquillity, and red standing for Mr. Ramsay's excitement, Lily fathoms the opposing forces that drive the Ramsays' marriage.¹⁷ In fact, she decides to represent Mrs. Ramsay with her son as a "triangular purple shape," and blue and red give rise to purple when mixed together. Jane de Gay claims that choosing to represent Mrs. Ramsay and James as a purple shape, "[Lily] is not trying to reduce them to abstractions, but to preserve the emotions [...] which they inspire in others" (6). Purple here represents Mrs. Ramsay's unifying forces which, according to Lily, hold the Ramsays' marriage together. Lily's representation suggests that she is an active perceiver who uses her sense of vision to compose the gestalt of her artistic vision (Woolf, *TTL* 38). Rather than portraying Mrs. Ramsay realistically, the painter uses her own symbolic interpretation of what she sees.

In the passage described above, there are references not only to visual but also to tactile and auditory impressions that increase synaesthetic quality of the scene. In gestalt

¹⁷ In *Theory of Colours* (1840), Goethe writes that "blue deepens very mildly into red, and thus acquires a somewhat active character, although it is on the passive side [...] It may be said to disturb rather than enliven," also suggesting that the relationship between blue and red is more of a contrastive one (313).

terms, these impressions are highly interconnected and serve either as a figure or ground for what she perceives with her sense of sight: the perceived figure depends on its ground and the other way round. In the first line of the paragraph Lily says, “‘It suddenly gets cold. The sun seems to give less heat’” (14). One can thus suppose that this sudden feeling of coldness influences the girl’s later sensory experiences. Perhaps the coldness is the reason for the increased intensity of blue (with coldness acting here as the ground). Or maybe the other way around: the intensity of blue and decreased brightness of the evening September sun causes Lily to feel colder (with coldness understood as the figure here). The narrator also mentions other impressions which influence the artist’s perception of the scenery: “the grass still a soft deep green” (tactile and visual impressions) and “rooks dropping cool cries” (auditory impressions) (14). For example, the word “cool,” though in this context implies calmness, can also relate to air temperature. Referring to Woolf’s tendency to fuse the character’s thoughts and actions, Alison Heney uses the phrase “matrix of associations” (19). The same phrase could, however, be used to describe the variety and inter-dependence of Lily’s sensory influx in this scene. Fusing the senses together and showing how one impression can influence another, Woolf demonstrates that one fragment, one piece of the matrix, can alter the final gestalt.

The relationships between different sensory impressions are analogous to the development of Lily’s artistic idea of Mrs. Ramsay, with Mrs. Ramsay understood as the figure, while coldness and colours are the ground. Using the figure/ground principle to elucidate Lily’s gestalt formation makes it clear how subjective and haphazard her perception is, and thus once again emphasises that the process is more important than the end-result. For instance, just because Lily feels cold, she might perceive colour blue as more vivid, and this, in turn, can change her entire perception of Mrs. Ramsay. While working on the portrait, Lily is influenced by a wide variety of sensual impressions that inadvertently change her vision.

This randomness and volatility gainsay the existence of objective truth, emphasizing the importance of subjective artistic vision over reality. As Tonder and Spehar suggest, what matters the most is the artist's *attempt* to grasp and compose the idea with aesthetics in mind: "Natural stimulus conditions are so haphazard that perception is hardly ever able to reach perfect aesthetic harmony [...] As a spectator, he or she is guided by perceptual sensitivity toward balance and symmetry to know the quality of the artwork as a phenomenal whole" (410). Even though Lily's perception is biased by random sensory impressions, she can mould them and complete her vision in a way that will satisfy her artistic endeavours. And, as mentioned above, this process of collecting and moulding or gluing impression is what ultimately defines her vision.

2.1.2 The dynamics of vision: forms of vitality

There are times in "The Window" section of *To the Lighthouse* when Lily's visions are exceptionally dynamic, engaging multiple sensory modalities. These scenes bear resemblance to forms of vitality discussed in the previous chapter. As already mentioned, Stern defines vitality as "a product of the mind's integration of many internal and external events" or, in other words, the subjective experience of an object or situation (4). Vitality constitutes a gestalt of movement, time, force, space, and intention, as perceived by the observer (4). Scenes in "The Window" which feature Lily's perception of the Ramsays' house constitute forms of vitality that involve many sensory modalities and emphasize the forcefulness of the perceived views. The dynamic character of the landscape helps Lily breathe life into her vision, and thus make it more animated: "It was as if the water floated off and set sailing thoughts which had grown stagnant" (Woolf, *TTL* 15). Looking at the swift water movements, the artist draws inspiration that would help her complete the gestalt.

Lily's perception becomes exceptionally vivid when she goes for a walk with Mr. Bankes to observe the bay. At that moment, she feels as if her vision was fused with that of the botanist, which provides the artist with a sense of unity and makes her more confident of her vision. While sharing experience of the external world humans cooperatively engage in the same "dynamic flow:" they focus on the same aspects of the experience and even share emotional reactions (Stern 140). Looking, Lily believes that she and Mr. Bankes perceive it in the same way. Woolf also makes the reader believe in the unity of the characters' minds by using the pronoun "they" to describe the scene: "they both smiled;" "they both felt" (Woolf, *TTL* 15). It quickly transpires, however, that what Lily initially takes to be a communion of minds is only a mirage. At the end of the passage, Woolf inserts "Lily thought" in parentheses, and thus reveals (in a deceptively simple way) that the depiction of the landscape and its effect on the perceiver is introduced fully from Lily's perspective, while Mr. Bankes' thoughts are elsewhere (15). As Dominic Scheck writes, "Lily feels a communion with Bankes, a communion that is false but functional in that it alleviates her sense of isolation" (212). This sense of companionship fulfils Lily's need for unity – the same one which draws her to observe the bay every evening (Woolf, *TTL* 15). The apparent communion with Mr. Bankes fills in Lily's internal gap, which also helps her mature not only as a woman, but also as an artist.¹⁸

The need that the narrator mentions in the paragraph's opening sentence does not necessarily entail a need for unity, but rather for a revival of creativity. Stern claims that human experiences consist of content-modality and dynamic-vitality strands, where the former encodes the sensory modalities the stimuli come from, the latter focuses on the

¹⁸ The apparent communion between Lily and Mr. Bankes also represents the unity of artistic and scientific perspectives on the landscape. Christina Alt discusses this problem in *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature* (2010), where she asserts that Lily allows Mr. Bankes to examine her painting because he exhibits "scientific disinterestedness" and "a spirit of objective inquiry that Woolf associates with science in its purest form" (109-110).

dynamics of the experience (such as speed or force). The dynamic-vitality strand is of primary importance because it revitalises the experience and makes it flow smoothly (25). This revitalisation is what happens to Lily's thoughts: "it was as if the water floated off and set sailing thoughts which had grown stagnant on dry land" (Woolf, *TTL* 15). In fact, Stern himself talks about "mental movement" which occurs when we feel emotions or thoughts rush through our minds (21). Seeing the movement of water, and the force it exerts, fuels Lily's artistic creativity. The sensory impressions become encoded in the dynamic-vitality strand and are no longer inert. This energy surge is beneficial not only to Lily's mental functioning, but also to her body, giving "some sort of physical relief" (Woolf, *TTL* 15). The dynamics of the observed landscape reassure Lily's senses that what they perceive is an ever-changing whole: a whole that due to constant alterations and movements constantly alters its shape.

Besides the force of the moving water, colours exert a significant influence on Lily's perception in this scene as they also generate a force which either fills Lily with inspiration or, paradoxically, hinders her creativity. The first mentioned colour is blue: "the pulse of colour flooded the bay with blue" (Woolf, *TTL* 15). As Stewart states, "blue opens a space for perception and meditation," meaning that it advances Lily's creativity and makes her more perceptive ("A Need of Distance and Blue" 81). In the passage, blue is interestingly paired with movement: it comes in a sort of kinaesthetic "pulse." Stern himself, while discussing experiences with no perceived duration, mentions that colours "imply motion," with cool and warm colours pulling away from each other (30, n.1). Even though blue does not contrast with any warm colour here, it still exerts a force on Lily that is not only mental, but also impactful on a physical level as it makes her heart expand and her body swim (Woolf, *TTL* 15). The visual impression which she observes with her sense of sight thus liberates the artist: it helps Lily transcend her body and open her perception. This liberating effect which blue

has on Lily is analogous to Woolf's portrayal of this colour in her other works, mainly in the short story "Blue" (1921). If we look at "Blue," the objects and colours that Woolf describes cannot be unequivocally linked with one specific meaning. According to Kathryn Benzel, blue and green serve Woolf to build ambiguity rather than define significance (166). This ambiguity ports us to explore our own interpretations of the text and find the subjective truth that it offers. For example, the monster (probably a whale) and his "shedding of dry blue scales" might symbolize transiency and mortality of living things that stands in contrast with the permanence of the cathedral (Woolf, "Blue & Green"). The monster, however, can as well have another meaning. "Spouting through his blunt nostrils two columns of water," he could stand for life energy and activity, while the cathedral with its inanimate form can symbolize passivity (Woolf, "Blue & Green"). This overbearing evasiveness and duality of meaning constitutes the subjective truth. How we interpret words and images is contingent on our prejudiced perceptions and fallible senses, and that is why our understanding of *Blue & Green* can change even depending solely on the time of day. This dynamic truth spurts the readers' creativity and generates multiplicity of meanings. In the same way, blue stimulates Lily's creativity by letting her explore her own artistic ideas without enforcing unnecessary limits.

Blue and the creative freedom associated with it are hindered by blackness which, in turn, is balanced with the whiteness of the spurting water. Black and white come over Lily forcefully, and not only do they elicit impressions in multiple sensory modalities, but they also engender her emotional responses. After blue passes, the body is "checked and chilled by the prickly blackness on the ruffled waves," suggesting the painful and stifling effect which this blackness has on Lily (Woolf, *TTL* 15). The prickles pin down Lily's perception, stopping her creative juices from flowing. Even though the image is dynamic and forceful because the waves are "ruffled," the effect of colour itself is detrimental to the artist's

perceptual experience. Whiteness, however, balances the oppressive quality of blackness. White resembles a blank canvas awaiting to be filled with the artist's visions. "A fountain of white water" alleviates blackness' repercussions: "it was a delight when it came" (Woolf, *TTL* 15). Interestingly, in "The Lighthouse," Lily refers to the canvas as a "hideously difficult white space," while comparing her ideas to a "spurting fountain" (Woolf, *TTL* 119).¹⁹ Whiteness here constitutes preparation for the later creative process, when it is no longer a blank space that spurts, but colours. In "The Window," whiteness exerts force through space, while Lily models the whiteness with "greens and blues" in "The Lighthouse," rendering the colours forceful and the white canvas static.

The colours described above give rise to a gestalt of the scene; or, as Stern would call it, a form of vitality. They converge, and this synthesis is epitomized in the iridescent mother of pearl which Woolf mentions in the last sentence of the passage: "wave after wave shedding again and again smoothly, a film of mother of pearl" (Woolf, *TTL* 15). Iridescence explains the contradictory effects of blue, white, and black. Iridescence occurs when light waves combine with one another in a process known as interference. Depending on the observer's perspective, the interference can either intensify or dim the visible colours (Indralingam). The iridescent mother-of-pearl therefore represents the effect which the view exerts on Lily. Even though the oppressive blackness interferes with the ruminative influence of blue and white, the colours combine to form an iridescent layer which, after being shed with the forceful waves gives rise to pearls. Nacre (another name for mother-of-pearl) symbolizes Lily's gestalt of the scene as well as her unfolding vision: it constitutes a convergence of different colours that have the potential to congeal into a complete, though mutable, form. Later in "The Window," Lily notices that blues and greens in her painting

¹⁹ Lily's creative process symbolised by the "spurting fountain" constitutes a parallel to Mrs. Ramsay's portrayal as an exemplar of fertility and motherhood. See Daugherty, Pratt and Silver.

seem like “clods with no life in them,” so she resolves to “force them to move, flow” (Woolf, *TTL* 35). The artist’s role thus resembles the one of waves which energize perception with their force; however, she attempts to transfer this perceived energy into her painting and create a form of vitality on canvas.

What comes next in the passage, however, suggests that Lily’s gestalt is not fully completed or vitalised because the movement and dynamics of the scene come to a halt. At first, Lily feels “excited by the moving waves” because she can still perceive an energising force (15). At some point though, the ship “stopped; shivered,” and this interruption in movement makes her (and possibly Mr. Bankes) shift attention to “the dunes far away” (15). Stewart states that “distance conveys perspective, proportion,” but this perspective also takes away the revitalizing sense of dynamics present in the less distant views (“A ‘Need for Distance and Blue’” 83). Lily notices that the faraway views are not only almost impalpable to the observer, but they also commune with “a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest” (Woolf, *TTL* 15). Unable to perceive the detailed dynamics, Lily feels that the dunes are static and lifeless. This immobility makes Lily fail to “complete the picture,” and thus form a dynamic gestalt of the view (15). According to the gestaltists, human beings strive to fill in the gaps because it is their natural tendency to perceive scenes or objects as wholes. Being no exception, Lily begins to look for another source of completeness in love.

2.1.3 Love as the adhesive agent: Koffka’s “ego-world field”

Before discussing love’s role as the adhesive agent, it will be beneficial to analyse the characteristics of loving from Lily’s standpoint in “The Window.” Lily adamantly refuses to fall prey to romantic love; instead, she desires deep, almost ineffable unity with the object of her artistic vision. Noticing Mrs. Ramsay’s attempts to match her with Mr. Bankes, Lily criticises the notion of marriage and calls it a “degradation” and “dilution:” “she need not

marry, thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution” (74). This is a kind of love emanated by Mrs. Ramsay which Lily rejects, choosing artistry over wifedom. According to Claudia Olk, for Lily loving “does not refer to sensual desire, but to a form of Platonic love” (46). In fact, Lily notices the existence of such love in Mr. Bankes’ gaze at Mrs. Ramsay. She calls it “distilled and filtered,” not attempting to “clutch its object” (Woolf, *TTL* 34). The freedom which this kind of love offers is the freedom an artist allows its object. This unrestricting feeling together with artistic veneration helps Lily establish connection, or as she calls it “intimacy” (discussed at the end of this section) with Mrs. Ramsay.

As already mentioned earlier in the thesis, gestalt psychology emphasizes the subjectivity of perception: also, subjectivity is associated with the observer’s personality and emotional state. Human perception “internalizes” the objects, and this internalization is what gestalt psychology puts most emphasis on (Tonder and Spehar 409). In his book *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, Kurt Koffka elucidates the relationship between the observer and the object using the concept of “ego-world field.” Explaining his stance, Koffka refers to the subjective appraisal of art pieces; however, I contend that this concept can also describe Lily’s relationship with the Ramsays, namely Mrs. Ramsay. As the observer, Lily sometimes lets her emotional state bias and overpower Mrs. Ramsay’s image. At other times, Mrs. Ramsay (“the object”) dominates Lily, influencing her emotional state.

In the case of Lily, the feeling which she experiences the most while staying at the Ramsays’ house is love, both her own love towards Mrs. Ramsay and the love between Mr. and Mrs Ramsay. According to the closure principle (see Chapter 1), the brain strives to see complete figures despite missing pieces, and love is what fills the gaps in Lily’s perception. As a balancing force, it aids the Ramsays’ marriage, connecting their glaringly opposite viewpoints; while as an adhesive agent, love glues together Lily’s often contradictory sensory

impressions and helps her create the final gestalt of the artistic vision. Tonder and Spehar explain that in a high-quality gestalt, balance between parts should come from within: “In a good Gestalt, internal stresses are solved through a self-limiting set of hierarchical rules, resulting in a unity in which all forces are internally balanced, with each part appearing in the right place due to the demands issuing from within the Gestalt, not from the outside” (410). In other words, love as one of the most common human feelings constitutes a natural source of integrity that induces the parts to stay together despite the differences. According to Alice van Buren Kelley, Woolf’s main goal was to “reveal the order hidden behind the daily blur, to bring together through some delicate arrangements [...] the opposing aspects of life” (75). Just like the novelist, Lily attempts to reconcile the perceived opposites to complete her vision and portray the resulting unity in her painting: the unity arranged by love.

Woolf portrays the relationship between Lily and the Ramsays as the relationship between the observer and the object by showing the artist’s gestalt formation and the effect emotions have on her vision. Using Koffka’s terminology, the Ramsays (the object) dominate over Lily. One of the crucial passages which describe Lily’s observations starts with an emphasis on the sense of sight. Woolf once again depicts a difference between the passive “looking” and active “seeing,” which involves subjective interpretation of the image: “looking down, purposely, for only so could she keep steady, staying with the Ramsays. Directly one looked up and saw them, what she called “being in love flooded them” (Woolf, *TTL* 34). The Ramsays’ love floods Lily as well, influencing the way she perceives them as well as the whole external reality. The couple “became part of that unreal but penetrating and exciting universe which is the world seen through the eyes of love” (34). Not only do the Ramsays see each other “through the eyes of love,” but also Lily perceives them through the lens of this emotion. They constitute a fragment of her gestalt, the internal idea of the now love-dominated scene.

The love emanating from the Ramsays gives rise to Lily's imagined sensory impressions: sensual experiences coming from within her rather than the external environment. Because the world seen through the eyes of love is "unreal," the visual and auditory experiences also do not occur in the objective reality. These impressions help her better understand the Ramsays and move beyond the outer layers of reality. Observing the Ramsays, Lily sees that "the sky stuck to them; the birds sang through them" (34). She associates the vastness of the sky and singing birds with the feeling of love. Emotions play an important role in the synesthetic process, often acting as an inducer of sensory impressions, and this is what we can observe in the case of Lily Briscoe (Safran and Sanda 39). The sight of Mrs. Ramsay elicits certain sounds and images which become a part of the painter's artistic vision. As Olk notes, "the artist's gaze focuses on form that cannot be immediately derived from sense impressions," which explains why Lily's experience of the Ramsays reaches beyond the external layer of existence (46). To complete her vision, Lily also needs to collect the internal impressions the family evokes in her, and the outpouring of love aids this process.

The inner impressions are, however, not the only sensations which Lily experiences in this scene. Originating in the outside world, visual sensory impressions also deluge the painter with their vividness and abundance. Love, in this case, is the force which helps Lily connect the external and internal layers of the Ramsays' existence, and thus gain a more complete insight into the dynamics of the family. Olk believes that *To the Lighthouse* "creates an analogy between two modes of existence of the image; one present and one absent, one immediate, solid and material and the other abstract and distant" (49). The window, the moving cloud and the bending tree which Lily notices while observing the Ramsays, constitute the "immediate, solid and material" existence, while the birds and sky mentioned in the previous paragraph belong to the "abstract and distant" mode. In fact, Woolf

herself talks about linking the two layers of reality in *Moments of Being*: “I feel that I have had a blow [...] it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole” (Woolf, *Moments of Being*). As Woolf’s literary surrogate, Lily also gathers “the separate incidents” into a whole, and then is able to recognise the “real thing,” the essence behind the sensually perceived reality (Woolf, *TTL* 34). In contrast to Woolf, however, Lily does not put this essence into words, but rather into colours and shapes which comprise her artistic vision. The Ramsays’ unifying power of love aids Lily’s “revelation,” here understood as the ability to enclose the spiritual and the mundane.

There is, however, some indication that Lily questions love as means of understanding Mrs. Ramsay by merging her material and immaterial existences. Besides unifying, love can also have a power to largely distort the sensory perception, and thus also make “wholeness” nearly unattainable. Leaning her head against Mrs. Ramsay’s knee, Lily notices that despite physical proximity and an abundance of sensory impressions, she cannot grasp Mrs. Ramsay’s essence. Through free indirect discourse, the narrator reveals Lily’s frustration by exclamations: “Nothing happened. Nothing! Nothing!” (37). Kristina Groover argues that Woolf portrays the body, and thus also sensory perception, as “both a means and an obstacle to knowing others” (218). On the one hand, it is only through senses that Lily can observe Mrs. Ramsay, listen to her voice, or smell her. On the other hand, as the painter remarks herself, there is a “deceptiveness” in beauty; the senses can easily be skewed, for example with love, making it more difficult to build a stable gestalt. Tonder and Spehar draw from Koffka’s arguments and argues that “if the artist’s conception is imperfect, the final gestalt will also remain imperfectly balanced,” meaning that once the material level is misperceived, the connection between the two layers of existence and the resulting wholeness will not be achieved (411). Lily asks herself whether “loving [...] [could] make her and Mrs. Ramsay

one,” possibly with hope that the unity between them would facilitate establishing the intimacy and see both the inner and outer layer of Mrs. Ramsay’s existence (Woolf, *TTL* 37). In the end, however, she comes to terms that she might never attain the desired completeness. Using the metaphor of a bee “drawn by some sweetness or sharpness in the air intangible to touch or taste” to hives “which were people,” Lily emphasizes the desire to connect with others; a desire rendered unachievable with erroneous senses (37).²⁰

2.2 Disembodiment in “Time Passes”

Sensory impressions become impressions only once human senses perceive them. Unless our consciousness endows these impressions with significance and meaning, they remain only vacuous sounds, smells, or images. By observing dynamic relationships in the environment, we endow them with vitality. It is the human brain that interweaves the outer and inner layers of experience, therefore breathing life into the former.

Woolf emphasises the importance of perception by removing human figures from “Time Passes” almost entirely. Instead, she portrays the decay which material objects face in the absence of human beings. If at all, descriptions of human activities appear mainly in brackets, isolated from the rest of the text. Groover rightly calls “Time Passes” “the most disembodied section” of *To the Lighthouse*; the disembodiment entails lack of perception, and therefore also a lack of interweaving between inner and outer realities mentioned in the previous section (223). Woolf herself considered “Time Passes” to be “the most difficult, abstract piece of writing,” mentioning specifically the absence of characters (Woolf *Writer’s Diary*). Even though “Time Passes” features numerous synaesthetic descriptions, there are no characters who could perceive the sensory impression, and when the house becomes full of

²⁰ For queer readings of Lily and Mrs. Ramsay’s relationship see Weil.

wildlife, nobody can see it. Tammy Clewell interprets “Time Passes” as Woolf’s response to the First World War. He refers to the novelist’s portrayal of nature in *To the Lighthouse* as “anticonsolatory mourning” and claims that by showing the power of nature in the deserted house, “Woolf strips the pathetic fallacy of all consolatory effects, insisting that when art neutralizes the trauma of private and public loss it obscures the very conditions that produce destructive violence” (214). In other words, Woolf does not introduce human beings to observe the house because she does not want them to misperceive and falsify the progressive decay. Instead, she shows the nature as a force that does not necessarily care about human ideals or motives behind the war and unscrupulously continues its workings. Lily thus does not have an opportunity to observe the progressive decay of the empty house, so the sensory impressions do not contribute to her gestalt formation in the same way they did before Mrs. Ramsay’s death (in “The Window”). Only after coming back to the house does she get to observe the changes that occurred over ten years of inhabitants’ absence and gets to appreciate Mrs. McNab’s restoration works which entailed collecting the decaying pieces together, reining in the natural forces and creating a form of vitality.

Already the opening passage of “Time Passes” focuses on sensory perception – namely, the sense of sight. Starting the section with a conversation on light and darkness, Woolf emphasises the crucial role of the ability to see. After Lily and others return from the beach, Andrew says that “it’s almost too dark to see,” while Prue notices that ““one can hardly tell which is the sea and which is the land”” (Woolf, *TTL* 93). This conversation recalls Lily’s contemplation on the far-away dunes and distant views communing with the sky (see p. 33-34). While in the previous case of the sky and dunes stillness was induced by the distance, here it is darkness that converges the sea and land, leading to inactivity. If it is impossible to differentiate between sea and land, it means that the forceful waves are invisible because darkness devours them in its shadow. As examined in the previous section

of my thesis, Lily seeks vitality rather than stillness; vitality spurs the artist's creativity, and thus energises her vision. Lily asks whether they should "leave that light burning," but Prue tells her to put it out (Woolf, *TTL* 93). Even though she attempts to stop the darkness, it inevitably creeps into the house and debilitates the senses.

The second episode asserts the omnipresent darkness devouring the Ramsays' house: darkness which inhibits gestalt formation and advances further fragmentation of reality. Interestingly, the darkness affects multiple sensory modalities: not only sight, but also touch and hearing. The narrator enumerates objects that the darkness "swallows up" (93). Among these objects, there are "sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers," suggesting that the shadows do not even allow one to perceive the world through touch (93). There is nobody there to feel the sharpness and bulkiness of a chest of drawers. The house seems not to exist because it does not exert any influence on the senses, almost as if it was immaterial. The narrator also mentions darkness swallowing "a bowl of red and yellow dahlias" (93). Including these vividly coloured flowers in the description, Woolf pinpoints the terrifying nothingness brought up by darkness. So ubiquitous in "The Window," colours are no longer visible, even the intense red or yellow hues. Woolf chooses to mention specifically dahlias in this passage concerned with decomposition because dahlia is a flower composed of numerous smaller flowers (so called florets, but often incorrectly referred to as petals). Dahlia's structure thus resembles one of a gestalt: its fragments, though function properly when separated, together give rise to a full flower. Swallowing dahlias thus represents the impossibility of gestalt formation. We cannot compose the whole if we cannot perceive its fragments in the first place. Besides the non-human objects, the narrator remarks that "there was scarcely anything left of body and mind" (93). In fact, Woolf herself describes the Ramsays' house in "Time Passes" as a house with "nothing to cling to" in her diaries (*A Writer's Diary*). Even the body parts do not have the rest of the body to adhere to:

“sometimes a hand was raised [...] or somebody groaned, or somebody laughed” (93).

Darkness does not decompose only the outside world, but also the human body itself.

Perception and gestalt formation are infeasible. In contrast to Stephen who uses the omnipresent darkness to unleash his imagination (see Chapter 1), Lily cannot even make use of the darkness because she is not there. The house is detached from Lily’s perception, and she is unable to connect the pieces together and produce a dynamic whole.

Later in the section, Woolf further discusses the impossibility of producing gestalts or forms of vitality in places ruled by darkness. In this passage, she seems to suggest that the shadows stem from the war-related moral decay. The passage personifies “divine goodness” who at first tempts humans with vibrant images of “the wave falling, the boat rocking,” but then resolves to draw the curtains, and thus closes the portal between the inner and outer existence (95). Closed curtains avert the forms of vitality from entering the empty house, so that any potential human observers are not able to experience life happening outside. The narrator asserts that “our penitence deserves a glimpse only; our toil respite only,” most likely referring to the atrocities of the war and lack of respect towards other human lives (95). To take revenge, the “divine goodness” shatters the sensory impressions and takes away the opportunity to “compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth” (95). Aware of human predilection towards wholes as means of making sense of the world and attaining truth, the divine goodness robs us of mental comfort. In absence of sensory perception, not only do we cease to learn about the reality, but we also do not experience the energising effect of life.

Nature constitutes a major source of sensory impressions in *To the Lighthouse* which puts it in control of human perception. “Time Passes” portrays nature as the force that sheds darkness over the Earth, robbing humans of sensory explorations and understanding the meaning behind life. Bonnie Kime Scott claims that for Woolf nature is “intimate with the

depths of the unconscious,” signifying that nature is a medium between humans and the inner layer of existence (219). The narrator mentions people going on walks to the beach with a dream of “sharing, completing,” “asking of the sea and sky what message they reported;” in other words, people who look for answers and try to form gestalts which would help them make sense of their existence (99). ²¹Questions about the meaning of existence re-appear several times in the novel. For example, “The Lighthouse” section starts with Lily asking, “what does it mean then, what can it all mean?” (109). As Kern writes in his book, twentieth-century society was no longer confident in their beliefs or moral judgements (*Modernism after the Death of God* 3). The continuous attempts to understand reality and life’s purpose largely reflected the gradual loss of faith in the omnipotent God. It, however, occurs that nature does not provide humans with the answers they need, condemning their “meanness” (Woolf *TTL* 99). As Julia Briggs claims, “with the Great War came the end of the romantic vision of nature as responding to the human world or working in subtle harmony with it, and in its wake, nature came to be regarded as an alien, incomprehensible force” (149). It is thus because of the war that Woolf decides to portray nature as this unobliging energy that refuses to cooperate with humans. “That dream of sharing, completing” hence becomes merely “a reflection in the mirror” (100). According to Olk, Woolf’s mirrors represent a sense of distance from the object (56). The mirror is a medium that not only prevents one from direct experience of reality, but it also distorts the indirect one because it is broken. Abstruse and fragmented, the reflection is meaningless. Nature does not reveal its truths to men, leaving

²¹ Woolf portrays these modernist dilemmas in *Mrs. Dalloway* through the characters of Doris Kilman and Septimus Smith. Doris Kilman, Clarissa Dalloway’s enemy, exemplifies a person with an overly simplistic vision of the world who uses religious beliefs to excuse her own mistakes. Septimus Smith, a veteran suffering from shellshock, expresses deep hope in the existence of God possibly because this hope helps him collect fragments of the war-stricken reality. Interestingly, Septimus seems to link God’s existence to human unity with nature: “But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body [...] when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement. The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; [...] Men must not cut down trees. There is a God” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*).

them oblivious. Woolf portrays nature's mysterious forces in her other works as well. One of the most vivid descriptions which aims to emphasise the dominance of nature over man comes from Woolf's diary and portrays the solar eclipse. Describing the event, Woolf outlines the emotions which sudden onset of darkness and return of light provoked in the observers:

[A]nd rapidly, very very quickly, all the colours faded; it became *darker and darker* as at the beginning of a violent storm; *the light sank and sank*; we kept saying this is the shadow; and we thought now it is over — this is the shadow; when suddenly the light went out. *We had fallen. It was extinct. There was no colour. The earth was dead* [...] and the next when as if a ball had rebounded the cloud took colour on itself again, only a sparky ethereal colour and so the light came back [...] What remained was the *sense of the comfort* which we get used to, of plenty of light, and colour (Woolf *A Writer's Diary*).

The author underscores death, nothingness and uneasiness which darkness incites in humans: “There was no colour. The earth was dead.” Shadows take life away from the world, purging it of vitality. That is why the falling wave and rocking boat mentioned in the previous paragraph are no longer visible. The eponymous window from the first section of *To the Lighthouse* is closed. Nature blocks the source of light: light that revitalizes the world with colours and comforts us with a sense of livelihood. Veiling the world with darkness, nature does not allow humans to connect the outer and inner layers of existence and denies them the existential awareness.

It would, nevertheless, be wrong to state that Ramsays' house remains completely dark, still, and lifeless. As time passes, life and light slowly return to the rooms (e.g., in a form of the lighthouse beams entering through the windows at night) despite the absence of

human perceivers (Woolf, *TTL* 103). Woolf also makes a distinction between night and day as well as between summer and winter, suggesting that regardless of human absence, nature does not halt its cycles. There is “the stillness and the brightness of the day” and “the chaos and tumult of night” (100). Interestingly, however, the daily light and night-time force do not coordinate. Because days are still, while nights are tumultuous, darkness covers the occurring movement, making it invisible to the human eye. Lack of human perception does not stop the natural world from thriving because “what power could now prevent fertility, the insensibility of nature” (102). The narrator lists various forms of life entering the empty house, such as toads, poppies, or swallows. Human absence does not frustrate the growth of non-human life; on the contrary, it lets the natural forces dominate.

Even though the wild nature slowly assumes rule over the house, it is a human who introduces it inside in the first place. Mrs. McNab decides to restore the house after years of abandonment and takes over Lily’s role as an artist. The woman not only introduces life into the house, but she also harnesses it: she turns the house into a form of vitality. Describing Mrs. McNab’s cleaning endeavours, the narrator writes that she “came as directed to open all windows and dust the bedrooms,” and thus inviting nature to meddle with the interior (96). Her actions are described as “tearing the veil of silence with hands [...] grinding it with boots” (96). Body parts, such as hands or feet, are no longer disembodied and passive; on the contrary, they constitute a source of life and force. Emphasising the vitality which Mrs. McNab and other cleaners bring into the house, the narrator uses a lot of verbs of movement and sound, such as “groaning,” “creaking,” “rising” or “singing” (102, 104). The incessant action precludes stillness, revitalising the house. Most importantly, the force is purely physical and unreflective. Woolf contrasts it with the aforementioned “mystic, the visionary,” who questions the sea and the sky about life’s meaning (97). While the mystic struggles to find the answers in the outside world, Mrs. McNab, just like nature, does not halt her cycles:

“she continued to drink and gossip as before” (97). In fact, Heine compares the cleaner’s work to that of the airs, suggesting that only a force of similar character can harness the wildlife: “Rather than being agents that respectively attempt to cancel each other out, the airs and the cleaners persist in an incessant process of doing and undoing” (129). Instead of focusing on the darkness which frustrates sensory perception and veils vitality, Mrs. McNab finds “some cleavage of the dark” (97). The woman looks for the vitality in herself to later fuel the house with life and prepare it for the arrival of old inhabitants. In that sense, she created a dynamic gestalt or form of vitality, similar to Lily’s vision at the end of “The Lighthouse” (105). One could, however, argue that Mrs. McNab’s labour remains uncredited and stripped off its meaning by Lily’s artistic endeavours. Such an interpretation of the relationship between Mrs. McNab and Lily also underscores the difference between their social backgrounds, with a simple working-class woman facilitating middle-class woman’s aesthetic ventures. Mary Lou Emery believes that “the value of their [Mrs. McNab’s and Mrs. Bast’s] labors—the meanings their labors might have acquired—are, however, stolen from them. As a result of this theft, Lily Briscoe acquires her vision” (226). In other words, Mrs. McNab’s physical work, serves merely to help Lily complete her artistic vision, and does not constitute a work of art itself. In gestalt terms, however, they are both creative forces because they both compose forms of vitality, whatever shapes these forms take.

“Time Passes” ends with the awakening of sensory perception as well as human consciousness. Life which enters the house is tamed, while nature starts providing humans with answers. This is also when Lily Briscoe gets to see the house once again and starts finalizing her vision. The narrator emphasises the open window through which the visitors could hear and see the outside world. At first, they prefer to sleep and not to see the outside world’s darkness despite its efforts to reach their senses. They ignore the nature which “came murmuring” and the night “flowing down in purple” (105-106). Only when in the morning

“the sun lifted the curtains, broke the veil on their eyes,” does the outside world manage to re-establish its connection with the inside (105-106). Along with human perception, the inner and outer layers of existence interweave once again. Lily’s awakening perfectly exemplifies this re-connection: “Her eyes opened wide. Here she was again, sitting bolt upright in bed. Awake” (106). The artist’s perception is active again: she can see, feel the Ramsays’ house with her fingers, (“[she] clutched at her blankets”) and hear the outside noises (106). As mentioned before, the night is “flowing down in purple,” with purple being the colour representing the Ramsays’ marriage. Nature speaks to Lily endowing her with a chance to complete the gestalt and her painting.

2.3 Memory and expression in “The Lighthouse”

Memory plays a major role in “The Lighthouse” section which describes how Lily reconciles herself to Mrs. Ramsay’s death and to the other changes that took place over ten years. Passing time helps Lily acquire distance towards the Ramsays and compose the gestalt of them more efficiently, but it also largely distorts her image of Mrs. Ramsay. Melba Cuddy-Keane believes that Lily “smooths her own agitation by unpacking a visual memory that contains more information than originally perceived” (60). In other words, Lily comes back to the impressions and smaller gestalts which she collected in the past and glues them together, forming her final vision of the Ramsays. Though helpful, the distance and “smoothing” have potential to largely influence Lily’s memories. As Cuddy-Keane says, the recollected visual memory “contains more information than originally perceived,” meaning that what Lily remembers as Mrs. Ramsay is Lily’s idea rather than objective reality: an idea influenced by numerous events and emotions experienced over the span of ten years. That is why the final gestalt and its portrayal in the form of a painting constitutes only Lily’s temporal, constantly changing idea.

In the following section, I analyse Lily's attempts at recollecting Mrs. Ramsay. I examine how Gestalt principles explain the fallibility of memory and how these explanations can be applied to Woolf's work. At the end of the section, I focus on Lily's struggle with expressing her idea through truthfully transferring it onto the canvas. While trying to remember Mrs. Ramsay, Lily realises the fallibility of her senses and comes to accept the difficulties associated with expressing her Gestalt to others.

2.3.1 The final vision and subjectivity of memory

Gestalt psychologists use their theories to explain the workings of human memory and its fallibility, also visible in "The Lighthouse" section. They focus on the concept of engram: permanent trace left by a stimulus in our brains which is believed to underlie memories. Engram can be replayed at will, for example when we want to recall an event or image (Kent). Several engrams can give rise to schemas: mental concepts that help us evaluate new happenings by juxtaposing them with past experiences (Kent). Though helpful, schemas significantly distort our memories. As humans, we exhibit the previously mentioned tendency to form complete and balanced gestalts. This inclination makes our brains exaggerate certain features ("sharpening") or weaken others ("levelling"). Sharpening and levelling make it easier to understand and remember objects which are more similar to what we already know ("normalizing"), objects featuring simpler and more regular patterns ("autonomous changes") or those which have conspicuous features ("pointing") (Koriat et al. 488). Both fallible, Lily's memory and sensory perception give rise to Mrs. Ramsay's image built of deeply subjective impressions connected by equally versatile emotions, such as previously discussed love.

The final vision does not come to Lily smoothly. The artist struggles to make sense of her memories and new impression of the Ramsay family house because she lacks the adhesive agent which Mrs. Ramsay provided in the past. Lacking love which could trigger Lily's memory and help her remember, the artist fails to compose the vision at first. She does

not feel any connection either between the fragments of the observed image or between herself and the image: “She had no attachment here, she felt, no relations with it [...] as if the link that usually bound things together had been cut” (Woolf, *TTL* 109-110). This lack of connection seems to result from both physical and emotional emptiness brought about with Mrs. Ramsay, Andrew, and Prue’s death. While looking at her empty cup, Lily reflects on the effects which these people’s absence has on her: “Mrs. Ramsay dead; Andrew killed; Prue dead too--repeat it as she might, it roused no feeling in her” (110). Lily does not experience any feelings and seems not to remember Mrs. Ramsay anymore; the physical absence of the dead inhabitants reflects itself in her emotional emptiness. Mrs. Ramsay’s love and its adhesive properties seems to have passed away along with the woman’s body, leaving Lily powerless in the face of unconnected impressions. Vainly asking how to bring the parts together, Lily almost accedes to the overpowering emptiness before she somehow retrieves Mrs. Ramsay’s connective power from the memory’s depths.

Trying to remember or find something that would help her connect the fragments and complete the vision, Lily finds a trace of Mrs. Ramsay’s feelings ingrained in her memory and manages to restore the memories.²² At first, she looks at the canvas “with its uncompromising white stare,” which represents the emotional emptiness and lack of adhesive love powers (Woolf, *TTL* 117). Interestingly, Lily seems to believe that the love is somehow embodied and visible: “she stood screwing up her little Chinese eyes [...]” (117). Even though sense of sight eventually fails to perceive love in the material form, it helps Lily to restore the feeling in her mind. According to Parvin Ghasemi et al., eyes play a very important role for retrieval of memories in Woolf’s work (329). Just like the smell of madeleines in Proustian *In Search of Lost Time* brings back to Charles Swann memories from

²² In my thesis, I discuss the concept of trace as defined in psychological theories of memory rather than as it is used in Derridean deconstruction.

his childhood, visual sensations help Lily remember her experience of Mrs. Ramsay from ten years ago: “There was something [...] she remembered in the relations of those lines cutting across, slicing down, and in the mass of the hedge with its green cave of blues and browns, which had stayed in her mind; which had tied a knot in her mind [...] (117).” The “knot” is an engram, a permanent trace which the visual impressions left in Lily’s memory. Untying this knot represents the recollection process which the artist faces while staring at the blank canvas. In *Moments of Being*, Woolf writes that “strong emotion must leave its trace; and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it” (Woolf, *Moments of Being*). There is a vestige of Mrs. Ramsay’s love in Lily which helps her discern and loosen the knot. The vestige comes to the surface when Lily notices the lines and the hedge which she used to observe ten years ago.

Once Lily remembers Mrs. Ramsay, she draws inspiration from her ability to connect the pieces, create perfect gestalts out of passing moments and turn them into permanent memory traces. Lily’s major recollection of Mrs. Ramsay comes from her walk to the beach with Charles Tansley, when they notice Mrs. Ramsay writing numerous letters. The memory is almost purely visual, focused on the participants’ activities and the look of things: “What they said she could not remember, but only she and Charles throwing stones and getting on very well all of a sudden and Mrs. Ramsay watching them” (Woolf, *TTL* 120). But even sight does not seem to matter as much as the perception of the inner, emotional layer of existence. Mrs. Ramsay is “so short-sighted that she could not see,” but she was still watching Lily and Charles and exerted power coming from her soul (Woolf, *TTL* 119). So even though she does not necessarily compose a gestalt of the visible part of the scene, she creates a whole out of the emotional, inner layer. This mysterious power is what connects the scene and people together, so that the scene becomes perennial and does not fade from Lily’s mind: “moment of friendship and liking – which survived, after all these years complete” (Woolf, *TTL* 120).

Mrs. Ramsay “resolves everything into simplicity” through passive observation; and simplicity, according to the gestaltists, is what makes moments more memorable. Even though she does not actively interpret the environment, Mrs. Ramsay still creates the gestalt of the scene (later appropriated by Lily’s memory) which is so perfectly balanced that Lily compares it to “a work of art,” a work of art that she likely wants to emulate in her own painting, so that it stands the test of time (Woolf, *TTL* 120).

After recalling another image of Mrs. Ramsay sitting on a drawing-room step, Lily realises that Mrs. Ramsay’s way of completing gestalts deprives them of vitality. Even though simplicity makes the moments more memorable, it takes away the essential complexity away from them. This lack of complexity is what makes the memories less vivid and lifeless. They are barely a shape which fails to convey the actual experience of the moment. Lily resolves that the gestalt’s perfection and beauty “stilled life”: “One forgot the little agitations; the flush, the pallor, some queer distortion, some light or shadow, which made the face unrecognisable for a moment and yet added a quality one saw for ever after. It was simpler to smooth that all out under the cover of beauty” (Woolf, *TTL* 132). Mrs. Ramsay imposes an artificial sense of unity on the scene, stripping it off its natural energy: “some light or shadow, which made face the face unrecognizable.” The gestalt does not constitute a form of vitality, but rather an almost still picture; and stillness, like the one featured in “Time Passes” is not necessarily wanted. Thomas G. Matro believes that Mrs. Ramsay imposes her vision on other characters, so that they themselves do not necessarily experience the desired unity. During the famous dinner, Mrs. Ramsay’s most substantial creation, the woman tries to force the guests to unite despite any glaring enmities (217-218). It thus becomes questionable whether Mrs. Ramsay’s way of gestalt formation and cementing the memories is what Lily might choose to pursue as an artist.

Inspired by Mrs. Ramsay's ability to withhold the scenes and render them almost indelible, Lily reflects on her own memory of Mrs. Ramsay, trying to tie her past impressions together. The artist recollects another image of Mrs. Ramsay's figure; this time solitary, walking across flowery fields. Lily notices that "it was strange how clearly she saw her," as if the artist herself began to question her memory's genuineness (Woolf, *TTL* 135). Impeccable and undistorted, the image seems too perfect to be true. Moreover, Lily remembers the fields to be specifically "purplish," which is the colour she learned to associate with Mrs. Ramsay (135). As the gestaltists would argue, Lily's memory is normalised and sharpened: she focuses only on certain features and unconsciously alters the image, so that it seems more familiar, and thus more memorable. In Lily's mind, Mrs. Ramsay ceases to be an individual and turns into a vision. She becomes a trace in Lily's memory. Woolf emphasises this process via density and ambiguity of pronouns. Reading the above passage, the reader is no longer sure whether the pronouns "she/her" refer to Lily or to Mrs. Ramsay, for example: "after she had heard of her death she had seen her thus, putting her wreath to her forehead" (135). According to Stewart, "memory and dream fuse with present sensations, as characters readjust to the once-familiar place, recuperating dispersed or distanced parts of their selves" ("A 'Need of Distance and Blue'" 85). Lily herself realises that what she sees in her mind constitutes merely an idea of Mrs. Ramsay that could "vanish" as easily as it appeared (Woolf, *TTL* 135). Her reminiscing about Mrs. Ramsay constitutes part of her self-discovery as an artist.

Excessive simplification constitutes undesired distortion; however, there are distortions which, altering the memories make them richer and more complex. Lily feels that her memory of Mrs. Ramsay needs nuance which simplicity does not necessarily guarantee. Although she admits that it would be easier to stick to simple images, she cannot ignore the complexities that revitalise scenes and memories:

One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on 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. The problem might be solved after all. Ah, but what had happened? Some wave of white went over the window pane. The air must have stirred some flounce in the room. Her heart leapt at her and seized her and tortured her (Woolf, *TTL* 150).

“Wave of white” disturbs the balance and simplicity of the scene. It represents an influx of energy and vitality, affecting Lily’s on an emotional and aesthetic level. The distortion has power to “seize” Lily; just like in observing the Ramsays in “The Window,” she submerges herself in the scene and experiences it to the fullest Even though it has been ten years since Lily saw Mrs. Ramsay, once nuanced, her image can still “inflict the horror,” signifying its undisputed forcefulness (150). Recognising the importance of nuance, the artist notices that “one wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with,” multiple perspectives which could help truly understand the essence of the person (147). There is beauty in complexity which even the most perfect gestalt cannot vanquish. Even though Lily’s memory is subjective and altered by the passing time, what matters more is her handling of that image. As Kern contends, modernist characters are “a mass of sensations whose ego boundaries are blurred with identities distributed between themselves and others” (*The Modernist Novel* 26). The same applies to the character of Mrs. Ramsay in Lily’s mind: there is no one objective truth about the person, but rather the person is what we perceive his or her to be. The awareness of these complexities is what lets Lily better understand her memory of Mrs. Ramsay. .

2.3.2 Finishing the painting: expressing the vision

After her vision of Mrs. Ramsay crystallizes, Lily faces another problem: how to convey it in a way that is understandable to those who will view the picture. As I discussed earlier, perception is highly subjective, meaning that every viewer will see the painting differently.

Biased by their own experiences and feelings, they will not be able to see Lily's vision exactly as it is. And this is the conundrum which Lily needs to reconcile with her desire for the vision's permanence.

Already the first paragraph of "The Lighthouse" signals Lily's problems with expression. When she comes back to the Ramsays' house, at first she cannot remember the Ramsays or any emotions which she previously associated with the family. This emotional void makes it difficult for her to express her vision in a painting: "For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs. Ramsay dead? Nothing, nothing—nothing that she could express at all" (Woolf, *TTL* 109). Even when later the memories of Mrs. Ramsay come back to her, she fails to successfully transfer them on the canvas. As she contents, "there was all the difference in the world between this planning airily away from the canvas and taking her brush and making the first mark (Woolf, *TTL* 117-118). "Making the first mark" is a risky action; not only does it set the ground for the rest of the picture, but it also made the artist ponder over her idea more carefully. As I mentioned earlier, Lily realises that her vision of Mrs. Ramsay is only one perspective on the woman. When she begins to paint and commences the process of expression, she recalls the complexity as well: "One line placed on the canvas committed her to innumerable risks, to frequent and irrevocable decisions. All that in idea seemed simple became in practice immediately complex; as the waves shape themselves symmetrically from the cliff top, but to the swimmer among them are divided by steep gulfs, and foaming crests" (118). Comparing her artistic idea of Mrs. Ramsay to the image of waves as observed from a distance versus from close-by, Lily clearly recognises that the true understanding of a person occurs when one discerns the intricacies and nuances. Even though they make the vision more complex, and thus harder to convey, this is the only way in which artistic expression can be achieved: expression which combines different perspectives and invites various interpretations.

Putting her energy into the picture, Lily transforms her internal gestalt of Mrs. Ramsay into an external form of vitality which can effuse energy on its own. Lily finally learns to embrace the complexities and turns them into her artistic asset. Her drawing process becomes more dynamic and rhythmical; she feels energy flowing through the brushes which helps her enliven the vision in the painting. Her way of painting resembles Mrs. McNab's activities from "Time Passes," in that it implies certain forcefulness and movement:

And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related; and so, lightly and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space. Down in the hollow of one wave she saw the next wave towering higher and higher above her (118).

The movement-describing verbs, such as "pausing," "striking," or "running" accentuate the dynamics of the drawing process. The artist's inspiration is forceful, coming in waves and filling her with energy. Without excessive thoughtfulness or asking unanswerable questions, Lily fully immerses herself in the activity and impregnates the lines with life. Just like Mrs. McNab revitalises the house by finding vitality within herself, Lily depends on her mental content while painting. In her diary, Woolf writes that Bob T. praised her extraordinary expressiveness: "[...] he called me fortunate [...] in having a mind that can express [...] in having mobilised my being – learnt to give it complete outcome. [...] So that when it is working I get sense of being fully energized – nothing stunted" (*A Writer's Diary*). The writer thus calls the creation process "mobilization" which helps her create wholeness. The "complete outcome" relates both to the artistic identity and the work of art. As Matro argues, "design of Lily's painting is also the 'design' of her thoughts;" thus, resolved identity is what gives rise to integral creations (222). Lily can finally express her ideas because she achieves

this “mobilised” state, where herself is revitalised; the artist reaches wholeness which she can transfer on the canvas.

Lily, however, still struggles with filling the canvas with ideas. Constantly feeling that something evades her, she tries to make it out in the surroundings. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, here, at the moment of expression, canvas no longer signifies artistic freedom, but rather a challenge for Lily to tackle: “[...] her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names, and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space” (Woolf, *TTL* 119). Even though Lily’s mind provides her with numerous inspirations, she still refers to the canvas as “glaring” and “hideously difficult,” signifying that she still experiences difficulties in expressing her vision. Later in the section, she contends that despite many beautiful images coming to her head, she wants to “get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything” (144). In other words, she wants to collect even more impressions before they become gestalts. Using her sense of sight, she tries to force them to come, but in the end resolves to “let it come [...] if it will come;” instead of chasing the impressions, she eventually lets them dominate and patiently waits for them to arise.

The last passage of the novel shows that Lily fully embraces her vision of Mrs. Ramsay, accepting its imperfections. She understands that the subjectivity of human perception makes it impossible for her gestalt to be the only possible truth. Every individual will create different connections between the fragments, resulting in different gestalts. Instead, change is what ensures memories’ survival and impressionability of gestalts. Because Lily’s painting will be approached in different ways, resulting in divergent interpretations, it does not matter whether she will remain fully faithful to her internal image of Mrs. Ramsay; what counts is the “attempt,” the sole expression of the idea:

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* (emphasis added) (154).

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, the gestaltists emphasise the process over the end result. This passage clearly supports that position: the painting is not perfect and will not provide one with objective truth, but the dynamic activity of drawing enlivens it. “Lines running up and across” do not necessarily impel stillness; on the contrary, they disturb it. As Matro claims, Lily lets go of the perfect unity (222). She resigns from the unity for the sake of vitality. Even though elements of the gestalt will not be perfectly connected, there is beauty in change, in the empty steps which signal human temporality. Being “finished” does not necessarily mean that Lily’s vision is fixed and immutable; on the contrary, the vision is “finished” only for now and can evolve in the future. The force brought about by change is even more underscored in the last sentence. “I have had my vision” signals that Lily’s gestalt now belongs to the past and is due to change along with the artist. Stern argues that all processes are “in constant change” and that “the dynamic aspects of experience are what ‘aliveness’ is about” (35). Change bridges the gap between the external and internal reality. Yes, the painting might be destroyed, and its meaning might change; but as long as it exerts a lasting impression on the viewer and remains dynamic, it survives.

Conclusion

In order to compose a satisfying gestalt, Lily gathers sensory impressions of the house, its inhabitants and, most importantly, Mrs. Ramsay. After her idea is complete, she attempts to transfer it on the canvas, crossing the barrier between external and internal existence layers. Her main goal as an artist is to ensure the painting's immortality. In the end, she achieves it by giving in to the dynamic nature of not only the environment, but also of her artistic expression. Besides conveying the static, exact image of the reality, Lily wants to express the changeability of it, the vitality behind her vision. As Harold Speed claims in his book *Oil Painting Techniques and Materials*, rhythm constitutes the most important aspect of art: "[...] the popular habit of judging a portrait entirely on its likeness is poor indeed [...]" *Rhythm, the other quality in painting that excites our interest, is where the real mystery and vitality of art exists* (emphasis added) (182). Speed contrasts exact portraits which aim at realistic portrayals with portraits which feature "rhythm," understood as dynamic relationships between colours and forms. In other words, he encourages the artists to focus on their own vision of the subject, instead of trying to impose an artificial sense of unity and perfect harmony. This is how Mrs. McNab introduces vitality back to the deserted house and how Lily decides to go about Mrs. Ramsay's portrait: focusing on how the constant change and dynamic movement. Lily's vision of Mrs. Ramsay is variable and unfixed which re-emphasises the importance of the process of composing gestalts rather than concentrating on their final forms. While focus on the end-result presupposes finality and immutability, focus on the process itself necessitates vitality and dynamism, the most important qualities of emotive art:

And, what was even more exciting, [Lily] felt, too, as she saw Mr. Ramsay bearing down and retreating, and Mrs. Ramsay sitting with James in the window and *the cloud*

moving and the tree bending, how life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled and whole like a wave which bore one up and threw one down with it, there, with a dash on the beach (emphasis added) (Woolf, TTL 34).

Observing Mrs. Ramsay, Lily captures the dynamic relationships between the woman and the environment. She also notices the constant movement and aliveness of the scene: “the cloud moving and the tree bending.” All of these elements give rise to a “whole like a wave,” or in other words, a gestalt which she uses to understand Mrs. Ramsay and finish her portrait. The gestalt and expressing it in a form of a painting will continue to change due to subjectivity of human perception; however, the crucial process of constructing the whole out of “separate incidents” will ensure its survival.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the significance of perception in the modernist *Künstlerroman*, drawing from gestalt psychology. Gestalt literary criticism helped glue the modernist fragments into a whole and give rise to new readings of Joyce's and Woolf's works. The theory of perception explained the development of the artist's mind, elucidating different processes involved in the artistic vision. Remaining highly perceptive and sensitive to various sensory impressions, the artists come up with their own interpretations, or gestalts, of reality and share these with recipients of their art. By transferring the gestalts into visible forms, such as poems or paintings, they make their ideas accessible to others, and thus bridge the gap between the internal and the external layers of existence.

The ideas or concepts are, however, not the only gestalts that *Künstlerroman* protagonists compose. The artists also collect the fragments of reality in order to comprise their own identities. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen writes several poems, but most importantly, he tries to construct a narrative around his own life. The diary that appears in the novel's final pages embodies these attempts, with the scattered endings emphasising Stephen's efforts to reconcile his national and religious selves with the artistic identity. Gestalt psychology explains the important role of perception in the boy's efforts: as a child Stephen focuses almost solely on his immediate environment, but while he grows, his cultural milieu starts to influence his cognition. I argued that this process of losing intellectual independence can be explained using Koffka's theories on the relationship between ego and object, where ego can dominate the object, or the other way around. I showed that in Stephen's case the struggle between ego and object was exemplified by his attitude towards Catholicism, and the impact that religion exerted on his perception. I concluded that this internal conflict never reaches full closure. Instead, Stephen enters the never-ending circle of creation and reconciles himself to the ever-changing identity.

In Chapter II, I examined the artistic development of Lily Briscoe from *To the Lighthouse* to show how gestalt approach can explain the creation of a single art piece. Observing or remembering Mrs. Ramsay, Lily collects fragments of the woman's impression which are to give rise to her picture: the ultimate gestalt. I used Stern's concept of dynamic gestalts, so-called forms of vitality, to argue that the subjectivity of human perception is what renders sensory impressions so erratic. I contended that, just like in Stephen's case, sometimes it is the ego and sometimes the object that dominates Lily's perception. At times, she lets herself dive into Mrs. Ramsay's impressions and be affected by their emotive power; however, she also attempts to grasp her vision of the woman, gain control over it and express it in the form of a portrait. In the end, Lily comes to accept the process of change and recognises the beauty that comes with the subjectivity of perception.

Using gestalt psychology to examine modernist *Künstlerroman*, I have emphasised the importance of perception in the development of the novelist character. The process of perceptual unification helps reconceive the modernist fragmentation and appreciate the changeability of meanings, resulting from different ways in which the fragments can be connected. My reading of *Künstlerroman* novels shows that the protagonists themselves also compose their own gestalts and share them with others by creating art. Moreover, the characters need to compose gestalts of their artistic identities which also undergo constant changes and remain dynamic, never reaching a point of definite maturation. In *Modernism after the Death of God*, Stephen Kern argues that "a central project of modernism in many areas of thought and art was a dynamic interaction of radical fragmentation necessitating radical unification that was always in process and never complete," and this thesis has explained this unification process not only from the perspective of the reader, but also from the perspective of the character (5).

Gestalt literary criticism can enrich our understanding of modernist literature by explaining its fragmentary nature. Iser claims that because of the numerous inconsistencies, the modernist texts “frustrate our desire to ‘picture,’ thus continually causing our imposed ‘gestalt’ of the text to disintegrate” (“The Reading Process” 290). Focusing on this frustration experienced by the recipients of the texts and the process of overcoming it constitutes a good starting point for the future research projects. Gestalt criticism could be beneficial in investigating not only the novelist characters, but also other aspects of the narratives, such as the setting or plot. Mina Sehdev’s “Perception, Textual Theory and Metaphorical Language” and Joseph Glicksohn and Chanita Goodblatt’s “Metaphor and Gestalt” are articles that explore the contributions of language, perception, hermeneutics and semiotic theory. They open up the doors for examination of the relationship between the modernist linguistic experimentation and gestalt psychology. Glicksohn and Goodblatt suggest that metaphor can be considered a gestalt because “[it] is different from the sum (or comparison) of its parts,” meaning that we can incorporate linguistic aspects of gestalt theory into literary criticism to reveal new possibilities of meaning, and thus compose new gestalts of modernist literature (87). For example, T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and its fragmentary nature could be explained with gestalt literary criticism as the theory would elucidate different relationships between Eliot’s metaphors. Gestalt could also help us investigate the modernist fascination with sensual exploration and kinaesthesia among different novelists. Offering an extensive analysis of how modernist authors address the sense of touch, Abbie Garrington’s *Haptic Modernism* lays the groundwork for future research which could draw from gestalt theory. For instance, a future reading of D.H. Lawrence’s works could use theory of perception to examine his preoccupation with sense of touch as means of empathising with others. One could discuss how gestalt formation can explain characters’ intimate relationships and Lawrence’s portrayal of their emotions. Most importantly, however, the gestalt approach can

be used to study the readers' responses to modernist texts not only on the level of character, but also on the level of space, time or narration. As Iser proposes, the readers come up with their own gestalts, or interpretations, of the texts ("The Reading Process" 288). This process is specifically interesting in case of modernist works whose fragmentation forces the recipients to create connections between different pieces of texts. Using different Gestalt principles, such as the Prägnanz law, which states that humans perceive ambiguous stimuli in simplified forms, future research could look at the subjectivity and fallibility of textual analysis.

This study constitutes a gestalt on its own, offering a new perspective on characterisation in modernist *Künstlerroman*. My work opens up many new avenues for research on gestalt literary criticism and its explanations of textual fragmentation. In the preface to one of his novels, Joseph Conrad says: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*," emphasising the importance of sensory perception for the readers of modernist texts (xiv). Future studies of modernist works can become gestalts which will unite the reading experience into a multisensory whole of hearing, feeling and seeing.

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