

“Some Collaboration Has to Take Place in the Mind”

Androgyny and Creative Dialogue in Three Works by Virginia Woolf

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Samandrag

Denne oppgåva tek føre seg Virginia Woolf si oppfatning av kreativitet, med utgangspunkt i androgyniomgrepet ho lanserer i essayet *A Room of One's Own* frå 1928. Denne teksten diskuterer vilkåra for skaparevne, med særleg omsyn til kvinner og litteratur, over fem kapittel, før essayisten i det sjette og siste kapitlet kjem med ei oppmoding til alle som ønskjer å skrive om å 'gløyme' seg sjølv og kjønnsidentiteten sin, for slik å gjere plass til eit 'androgynnt sinn'. Denne utsegna har vore opphav til ei mengd ulike lesingar i ein heterogen debatt om Woolf sitt kreativitetskonsept. Ein gjennomgåande tendens sidan 1970-talet har likevel vore det feministiske perspektivet med fokus på det kjønnsdualistiske i Woolf sin androgyne 'visjon'. Eit utval av lesingar med feministisk innfallsvinkel presenterer eg i resepsjonskapitlet som kjem først i denne oppgåva. Tanken bak dette kapitlet er å gi eit innblikk i etablerte oppfatningar samstundes som eg gjer tydeleg min eigen posisjon i høve til desse, som representerer ei bakhtinsk oppfatning av kreativ androgyni som *dialog*. Det dialogiske prinsippet inneber eit gjensidig avhengig høve mellom *sjølv* og *andre* som Bakhtin sidestiller med den estetiske spenninga mellom *forfattar* og *helt*. Mi lesing tolkar det essayisten kallar eit mentalt samarbeid mellom mann og kvinne som ein metafor for den etiske og estetiske aktiviteten mellom sjølv og den andre, som i følgje Bakhtin må sjåast som eit allmennmenneskeleg gyldig prinsipp. Over dei neste to kapitla presenterer eg lesingar av romanane *Mrs Dalloway* og *To the Lighthouse*, med fokus på relasjonane mellom karakterane som meditasjonar over kreativitet. Medan Woolf sine tekstar er polyfone rom utan eitt dominant perspektiv, følgjer eg ei meir eller mindre klar linje frå Elizabeth Dalloway i *Mrs Dalloway*, via Lily Briscoe i *To the Lighthouse* og til Mary Carmichael i *A Room of One's Own*, med omsyn til korleis dei kan seiast å uttrykkje skaparkraft som eit androgynnt, dialogisk prinsipp.

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Abbreviations

Below is a list of abbreviated titles and references used in this work.

AROO: A Room of One's Own (Virginia Woolf)

MD: Mrs Dalloway (Virginia Woolf)

TTL: To the Lighthouse (Virginia Woolf)

AA: Art and Answerability (Mikhail Bakhtin)

OED: Oxford English Dictionary

Bowlby I: "Thinking Forward Through Mrs Dalloway's Daughter" (Rachel Bowlby)

Bowlby II: "The Trained Mind: *A Room of One's Own*" (Rachel Bowlby)

Schröder I: "*Mrs Dalloway* and the Female Vagrant" (Leena Kore Schröder)

Schröder II: "The Drag of the Face on the Other Side of the Page" (Leena Kore Schröder)

Preface

Discussing “[w]hat conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art” (*AROO*: 27), the voice speaking in Virginia Woolf’s 1928 essay *A Room of One’s Own* reflects that “a great mind is androgynous [...] a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine” (*AROO*: 97). This idea seems to originate in the essayist’s observation of a man and a woman sharing a taxi; “the sight of the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave me made me also ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness?” (*AROO*: 96). Pondering how “[s]ome collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished” (*AROO*: 103), in order for the mind to be “fully fertilized” (*AROO*: 97), the narrator concludes that, indeed, “[i]t is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (*AROO*: 102). She thinks to herself, however, that “it would be well to test what one meant by man-womanly, and conversely by woman-manly, by pausing and looking at a book or two” (*AROO*: 97).

The present thesis reads the this last quote as an invitation to investigate Woolf’s concept of creativity as it is conveyed in three of her books, taking as its point of departure the questions raised above about the androgynous mind. I have chosen to include the novels *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* in my discussion of Woolf’s negotiation of a topic that followed her over time; as both these novels explore various ‘visions’ of creativity through different characters and how they relate to each other. Taking into account the speaker’s statement that “books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately” (*AROO*: 79), the following chapters read the three texts as ideationally and thematically connected through a sustained meditation on the conditions of creativity. This implies a

methodological approach of treating the texts as participants engaging in a conversation about androgyny.

Presented as a creative ideal, Woolf's concept of androgyny raises questions about artistic creativity as related to sex and gender as well as the premises for the human ability to create. The etymological basis and meaning of androgyny as a "[u]nion of sexes; hermaphroditism" (*OED*) has commonly translated in critics' minds to a compound of masculine and feminine characteristics, leading many to focus on Woolfian androgyny as a concept closely tied to sexual categories. As much as I value the mainly feminist perspective from which Woolfian androgyny has been read over the past few decades as both necessary and productive, I find that it has left out some important aspects and thus overlooked a wider, ethical potential latent in the vision of the aesthetically productive, androgynous mind. Positioning myself against rather literal readings of androgyny as a matter of sexual distinctions, I understand the androgynous mind more as a metaphor of a creative state that is also fundamentally ethical. For a perspective on Woolf that is largely unexplored, I shall turn to Mikhail Bakhtin and his theories of *dialogue* and *dialogism*, paying specific attention to his thoughts of *self* and *other* in the essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity".

Founding his *architectonics* on the perceptual difference between self and other, Bakhtin treats the latter connection as the aesthetic relation between *author* and *hero*. Dialogue, understood as the recognition of *otherness* and the interchangeability between self and other, Bakhtin sees as a "necessary principle" that has the "creative, productive character" (AA: 5) of an "aesthetic event" (AA: 20). With reference to Bakhtinian dialogue, my thesis defends a more extensive definition of artistic androgyny as an aesthetic as well as ethical position, by reading the "rhythmical order" (AROO: 95) of the man and the woman's collaboration in the mind as metaphorical of the "necessary principle" by which the self and the other engage in creative dialogue. The method I employ to demonstrate the productivity of

this reading combines the dialogical view of human relations with the essayist's statement that "books have a way of influencing each other" (*AROO*: 107), juxtaposing and conjoining Woolf's works in an intertextual whole in which their individual views enter into a complex conversation about the dialogical aspects of androgyny as a creative concept. Their meeting points are in the spaces between them, summoning and connecting the texts in a dialogue realising their creative potential through character relations within and across the works.

Bakhtin's view of human relations as essentially dialogical and thus creative events has inspired me to focus specifically on Woolf's character connections in my enquiry into the dynamics of artistic androgyny. I must, however, emphasise that my employment of the notion of *dialogue* throughout this thesis is not consistently Bakhtinian; I use the term somewhat freely to explain and open up for what I see as the expansive potential of the androgynous vision as it is presented in *A Room of One's Own*. Thus, I read the associations between the characters as meditations on creativity as a dialogical relation. This is the premise for my discussion of the creative efforts of the characters; although not all of them have explicitly articulated artistic visions, their various ventures into the world can be considered as aesthetic projects.

There is already a vast amount of criticism considering Clarissa Dalloway's party-giving as a form of 'social art'. In Chapter Two, I read the novel as centred around one woman's effort "to combine; to create" (*MD*: 134) an ethical as well as aesthetical whole by using the specific social arena of the party to reach some deeper dimension of reality in which all the separate parts come together on a creative, dialogical level. It may be, however, that some parts remain separate, such as Clarissa's daughter Elizabeth, being confined to a role in which she cannot grow out of her position as a beautiful poplar tree (*MD*: 147). Clarissa's aim of creating harmony out of people's different 'visions' thus reveals itself as problematic. Chapter Three shows how Lily Briscoe's explicitly artistic vision reflects both Clarissa's

effort to combine and Elizabeth's wish to escape the restraint that her mother's vision represents to her development of 'a vision of her own'. Like Elizabeth, Lily strives to position herself against a motherly figure, struggling to articulate Mrs. Ramsay's presence, then absence, in paint on her canvas. Lily's aesthetic, however, reaches further in terms of allowing people space for their otherness and thus comes closer to the androgynous mind that is "resonant and porous", that "transmits emotion without impediment" and is "naturally creative, incandescent and undivided" (*AROO*: 97). These are characteristics of the androgynous kind of writing that Mary Carmichael represents, and for which Elizabeth and Lily may be said to pave the way. There goes a dialogical line from Elizabeth's vague creative effort contemplating how "[s]igns were interchanged" and how the "perpetual movement" of clouds rhythmically strikes light and darkness to the earth, via Lily's struggle to portray an other as well as herself through some "relations of masses, of light and shadows" (*TTL*: 59), to the essayist's explicit ideal for the creation of works of art, enabling an "incandescent" state of writing.

Both Chapters Two and Three position themselves against other, intellectually complex critical perspectives. My aim in accounting for these perspectives has been to explain my own position in relation to more established approaches, an objective which inevitably has not allowed for a full exploration of other critical perceptions of Woolf's concept of creative androgyny. To show how my own reading relates to and departs from other, mostly feminist approaches, I have found it pertinent to include a reception chapter introducing a range of selected perspectives dating from the time of the essay's publication and to the present. The next pages will lay the ground for the argument in the proceeding chapters, and the consideration of the androgynous mind as an ethical as well as aesthetic experience going beyond the issues of sex and gender.

Chapter One

The Reception of *A Room of One's Own*

Discussing the literary achievements of the fictional writer “Mary Carmichael”, the speaking subject of Virginia Woolf’s 1928 essay *A Room of One’s Own* applauds how “[Carmichael] mastered the first great lesson; she wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself” (*AROO*: 92). The section on Mary Carmichael is found in the fifth of the essay’s total of six chapters, and is preceded by four chapters debating the topic of “Women and Fiction” and attempting to explain the absence of women writers through history. The focus of these first chapters is the historical and social position of women, and the main argument seems to be that women have not had “a dog’s chance” (*AROO*: 106) to aspire in any creative field due to their social submission to men, the domestic duties laid upon their shoulders, and last but not least, their lack of a room of their own. Significantly, the narrator chooses to exemplify the conditions having prevented females from developing artistically in the fictional sister of Shakespeare, “called Judith, let us say” (*AROO*: 48).

“The Androgynous Mind” as a Creative Ideal

Also significant is the first-person narrator’s own, nameless self: “‘I’ is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being” (*AROO*: 6), or rather, a multi-named identity: “call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael, or by any name you please - it is not a matter of any importance” (*AROO*: 7). The unsettled nature of the narrator may be said to point to the last chapter of *A Room of One’s Own*, in which she presents her idea of how women with

literary ambitions should go about to succeed as writers, defending what she sees as the ideal and necessary mental state for creating; “the androgynous mind” (*AROO*: 97). The last term in particular formed the basis for one of the main controversies concerning Woolf’s essay.

Theorists and feminist scholars such as Elaine Showalter, Toril Moi, Jane Marcus and Rachel Bowlby have all responded in different ways to Woolf’s concept of androgyny and its implications as regards the relationship between sex, gender and artistic creativity. This chapter will present some of the most significant views in the debate.

Early Reception

The immediate critical reception of *A Room of One’s Own* was on the whole good, in the sense that many critics seemed to read it as charming, stylistically delightful and politically inoffensive. The general focus in the early reviews was on the essay’s light, chatty tone rather than the social critique inherent in her text, leading one critic to ask “what matters her argument provided she keeps on writing books like this?” (*New York World*, 29 October 1929, 15; in Rosenman 16). Whether deliberately or not, most contemporary critics tended to overlook or miss the essay’s irony and social engagement in favour of a concentration on its style and ‘conversational’ quality. Moreover, where the political messages *were* picked up and commented upon, they were sometimes misunderstood and read contrary to the meaning of the argument in question. An example of this is Arnold Bennett’s misreading and applauding of Woolf’s ironic cliché that “[w]omen are hard on women” (*AROO*: 109). Woolf’s narrative technique, with its shifts and interruptions, was also seen as a sign of the author’s lacking literary skills and ability to focus, rather than exemplifying the distractions and disturbances known to those who have no room of their own.

Early Feminist Criticism: Showalter's Condemnation of Androgyny as Escape

The essay's focus on gender was not taken seriously as a debating point until the 1970s, when a new approach to literature and literary criticism emerged along with the feminist movement. The rediscovery of Woolf as a writer on feminist issues called for a revaluation and a re-evaluation of her works, and many joined in the discussion of whether or not Woolf was truly a feminist, and in what way. *A Room of One's Own* became one of the most debated texts in feminist criticism, much due to its concept of androgyny as a creative ideal. Less outspokenly feminist and anti-patriarchal than *Three Guineas*, an essay published a decade after *A Room of One's Own*, the latter has been accused of shying away from important political matters and refusing to take a stand in the debate on feminism, excusing and veiling its arguments in layers of irony, ambivalence and self-contradictions. One of the most prominent voices expressing this view of Woolf is Elaine Showalter.

Taking as her point of departure Carolyn Heilbrun's celebration of the Bloomsbury Group's androgynous lifestyle¹ (Showalter 263), Showalter claims that aesthetic androgyny represented no more than a means of flight to Woolf, a "myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition" (Showalter 264). Seeking a re-evaluation of the close to iconic status of Woolf among contemporary women writers, Showalter calls for a demystification and even killing of "the legend of Virginia Woolf" (Showalter 265), the Woolf who has herself become the Angel in the House she described in her essay "Professions for Women". Drawing on Nancy Topping Bazin's understanding of Woolf's androgyny as an attempt to reconcile the manic and the depressive stages of her mental illness, associated with femininity and masculinity respectively (Bazin 6), Showalter suggests that her androgynous vision was "a struggle to keep two rival forces in balance without succumbing to either" (Showalter 266). This struggle

¹ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Towards a Recognition of Androgyny*, New York, 1973, p. 123.

and unwillingness to fully embrace her femaleness, Showalter connects with what she calls “crises in female identity” (Showalter 267); reminders of her own mortality and most importantly her physicality as a woman, as a female body. The ‘room of one’s own’, Showalter claims, “is a symbol of psychic withdrawal, an escape from the demands of other people” (Showalter 286). Woolf’s aesthetic ideal seems to Showalter a cowardly solution to an existential dilemma, a betrayal of her own sex and a flight that must not be confused with the liberation that critics such as Heilbrun believe it to represent. The narrative style and structure of the essay which was applauded though frequently misunderstood at the time of its publication, Showalter finds extremely defensive and impersonal, and she complains that “[e]ven in the moment of expressing feminist conflict, Woolf wanted to transcend it. Her wish for experience was really a wish to forget experience” (Showalter 282). Although grasping the irony intended in comments such as “[w]omen dislike women” (*AROO*: 109), on the whole Showalter cannot see the parodic passages, the distanced ‘I’ persona and the ultimate flight into utopian androgyny as anything but a sly refusal to be earnest about a serious topic. Not only betraying and stifling her literary talent, in Showalter’s terms, Woolf’s problem of achieving “a coherent and comfortable sexual identity” (Showalter 265) made her “as thwarted and pulled asunder as the women she describes in *A Room of One’s Own*” (Showalter 264), ultimately leading to her tragic suicide.

Deconstruction: Moi’s Kristevan Approach

Showalter’s view of Woolf’s flight into androgyny remained relatively unchallenged until Toril Moi wrote her introduction to *Sexual/Textual Politics* in 1985. Moi opens her discussion by pointing out what she considers Showalter’s main mistake in reading *A Room of One’s Own*; understanding the “repetition, exaggeration, parody, whimsy, and multiple viewpoint” (Showalter 282), as well as Woolf’s technique of “refusing to be pinned down to one

unifying angle of vision” (Moi 3), as cowardly elusiveness and fear of taking a stand. As the absence of Woolf’s personal experiences seems to Showalter to signify her lack of commitment to the feminist cause, Moi comments that “it would be reasonable to assume that [Showalter] believes that a text should reflect the writer’s experience, and that the more authentic the experience is felt to be by the reader, the more valuable the text” (Moi 4). Moi, on her part, admires Woolf’s rejection of the aesthetics of authenticity and the latter’s patriarchal fundament celebrating the unified self modelled on the “powerful phallus”. This autonomous subject is “the *sole author* of history and the literary text: the humanist creator is potent, phallic and male - God in relation to his world, the author in relation to his text” (Moi 8). With this view as a theoretical and political basis, Moi argues that Showalter’s reading reduces the text to “a passive, ‘feminine’ reflection of an unproblematically ‘given’, ‘masculine’ world or self” (Moi 8).

Moi goes on to suggest that Woolf’s writing anticipates deconstruction in her exposition of how “language refuses to be pinned down to an underlying essential meaning” (Moi 9). Referring to Jacques Derrida and his theory of language as “an endless deferral of meaning”, a play in which no fundamental or transcendental unit defines and explains other elements, Moi launches the idea that Woolf consciously exploits “the sensual nature of language”, rejecting “the metaphysical essentialism underlying patriarchal ideology, which hails God, the Father or the phallus as its transcendental signified” (Moi 9). Presenting Kristeva’s division of the feminist struggle into three positions, Moi argues that Woolf may be seen as representative of the third position, in which “[w]omen reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical” (Moi 12). Moi uses Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* as an example of the subject deconstructing the oppositions of masculinity and femininity, which, according to Moi, is precisely what Woolf feels that the goal of the feminist struggle ought to be. Thus Woolf’s concept of androgyny should be read in the light

of deconstruction; it is not “a flight from fixed gender identities, but a recognition of their falsifying metaphysical nature” (Moi 13). Moving away from feminism founded on difference as dichotomy, Moi again aligns with Derrida and his notion of *différance* as an endless displacement of meaning. The opposite of this view, Moi claims, would be Bazin’s reading of androgyny as “the *union* of masculinity and femininity” (Moi 14), perpetuating the duality as essential and ‘meaningful’.

Marcus’ Marxist Reading

Another feminist critic discussed by Moi is Jane Marcus. Moi’s accusations against Marcus echo her argument against Showalter, in that they both seem to take a biographical approach in their readings of Woolf’s works. Moi’s critique is based on the article “Thinking Back Through Our Mothers”, in which Marcus describes Woolf as a “guerilla fighter in a Victorian skirt” (J. Marcus 1), a socialist and feminist trembling with fear and anger as she wrote. The direct causality Marcus establishes between Woolf’s emotional experience of writing and her actual works is attacked by Moi as a “fall back into the old-style historical-biographical criticism much in vogue before the American New Critics entered the scene in the 1930s” (Moi 17). Like Moi, Marcus associates Woolf’s aesthetics with Brecht, though focusing more on the so-called *collective* aspect of her writing, what she calls the “collective sublime” (J. Marcus 6). Taking as her starting point Woolf’s metaphor of maternally inherited creativity, Marcus reads Woolf’s essays as expressions of an “anti-individual ‘philosophy’” (J. Marcus 10) standing up against the male, false ego, the ‘I’ failing as a creative subject. For Marcus, Woolf’s maternal metaphor of creative heritage and her idea that “masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice” (*AROO*: 66), signify an aesthetic concept going against the idea of solid and solitary genius, while

simultaneously preserving “the romantic notion of literary progress” (J. Marcus 10). The moral authority of the poet is thus “derived not from an individual talent but from the expression of collective consciousness. The ‘egotistical sublime’ of the patriarchy has been replaced by a democratic feminist ‘collective sublime’” (J. Marcus 10).²

For Marcus, Woolf’s use of English as a “fertile and promiscuous mother tongue” (J. Marcus 17) shows her insistence on the creative and liberating potential of language as a mother through which to think back. Marcus sees Woolf’s collective principle as specifically feminine, and despite her agreement with Showalter that “[Woolf] was pushing the literary she-condition further and further towards the objective universal condition” (J. Marcus 18), Marcus feels that Woolf was true to the feminist cause. Language became the alternative to killing the Angel of the House, a way of avoiding “mental matricide” for the daughters and instead create “a linked chain of sisterhood over past time in present space, and rescue and redeem their own mothers’ lives from their compromises with the patriarchy” (J. Marcus 21). For Marcus, the ultimate achievement of Woolf was her composition of a myth of female creativity and her encouragement for her ‘daughters’ to restore and revise their past in the image of the “collective sublime”. To me, Marcus’ constant focus on the maternal aspects of Woolf’s concept of creativity appears to evade the latter’s explicitly *androgynous* ideal, expressing a political agenda that may limit the potential of her reading.

Marcus’s understanding of Woolf’s writing as “a revolutionary act” (J. Marcus 1), as

² Marcus has quite a literal understanding of the maternal inheritance of creative consciousness, referring to Woolf’s relationships not only to her mother and sisters, but to aunts and other female friends, and how they greatly influenced her thinking and writing. Two women acquaintances, the social worker Margaret Llewelyn Davies and the composer Ethel Smyth, were allegedly of particular importance to Woolf. Marcus suggests a likeness between Davies and Mrs. Ramsay as the nurturing mother figure caring for the sick, and likewise compares Smyth to the passionate hostess, carefully ‘composing’ her parties and social gatherings. Smyth’s views on the structural and rhythmical aspects of creative composition were especially interesting to Woolf, always concerned with the musical qualities of language and how writing is essentially a rhythmic arrangement of words (J. Marcus 19). In this musical metaphor, harmony and disharmony are associated with the feminine and the masculine respectively. Davies and Smyth’s ways of engaging with socialism and the suffragist movement were also significant in their relations to Woolf. Marcus views all three of them as “mothers”, Davies of feminism, Smyth of music and Woolf of literature, in the sense that they provided a fundament for “daughters” to develop and think back through in their own creative and political processes.

well as her focus on linguistic rhythm beyond conscious creativity, seems to echo Kristeva's view of modernist poetry as "a 'revolutionary' form of writing [...] in which the rhythms of the body and the unconscious have managed to break through the strict rational defences of conventional social meaning" (Moi 11). However, Moi sees an essential difference between Marcus and Kristeva in their attitudes to the fixity of gender identities, and what it means to be a feminist. Moi questions Marcus's rather biographical comparison of Woolf with the Marxist critic Walter Benjamin, and it might be suggested that Marcus represents the second tier in the scheme of the feminist struggle, as summarised by Moi: "Women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference. Radical feminism. Femininity extolled" (Moi 12).

Psychoanalytical Perspectives: Bowlby, Jacobus and Minow-Pinkney

Marcus's wish to "retrieve the radical political dimension of Woolf's writing" (Minow-Pinkney x) was seen as valuable by many, but challenged by just as many feminist critics. Moi's was a significant and central contribution to the debate, but there were various other voices making heard their opinions on the re-evaluation of Woolf's aesthetic and feminist agenda. Makiko Minow-Pinkney and Mary Jacobus both represent a psychoanalytical approach to Woolf's works. Concerned with the *difference* of 'the feminine sentence', they refer to Kristeva as well as Jacques Lacan, to show how language may be seen as a point where the so-called *symbolic order* meets the *semiotic order*.

In her article "The Difference of View", Jacobus focuses on the deconstructive quality of a 'feminine language', as

a process that is played out within language, across boundaries [,] allying feminism and the avant-garde in a common political challenge to the very discourse which makes them possible; the terms of language itself, as well as the terms of psychoanalysis and of literary criticism, are called into question - subverted from within (Jacobus 29-30).

Echoing Moi's view, Jacobus does not share the traditional view of difference as opposition,

but rather sees difference “as a multiplicity, ambiguity and heterogeneity which is that of textuality itself” (Jacobus 30). ‘Feminine writing’ cannot escape patriarchal discourse, but it can aim to disrupt and deconstruct it; “to write what cannot be written” (Jacobus 30). She sees this disruptive quality in Woolf’s attack on Charlotte Brontë; by referring to a ‘mother’ writer and her anger, Woolf edits Brontë’s anger into her own text and “creates a point of instability which unsettles her own urbane and polished decorum” (Jacobus 35). For Jacobus, this transmission of anger between literary mothers and daughters paradoxically signifies both disruption and continuation. By introducing Brontë’s excessive emotion, Woolf tears a hole in her own text, creating a rift which “exposes the fiction of authorial control and objectivity, revealing other possible fictions, other kinds of writing; exposes, for a moment, its own terms” (Jacobus 35). The concept of androgyny becomes, for Jacobus, “a harmonizing gesture” (Jacobus 39), overcoming the “splitting off of consciousness” (*AROO*: 96) experienced by the woman excluded from educational institutions; dissolving “the repressive male/female opposition which ‘interferes with the unity of the mind’” (Jacobus 39); and opening up for a mind that is undivided and whole - not monolithic, but rather heterogeneous and unimpeded, “open to the play of difference” (Jacobus 39). Again reflecting Moi’s thoughts, Jacobus here seems to affirm Kristeva’s third position rejecting a metaphysical gender dichotomy.

Minow-Pinkney represents a slightly different reading of *difference* and androgyny. She draws heavily on Lacan’s division between the symbolic and the semiotic phases of human life, associating the latter with the feminine in language, defending “difference against the existing order of a discourse of sameness organised around a single standard, the man, or, in psychoanalytic terms, the phallus” (Minow-Pinkney 10). Minow-Pinkney understands Woolf in her early works as repressing “a potential feminist awareness and universalis[ing] the issue into the Oedipal polemic of the generations” (Minow-Pinkney 2). However, the feminist issue comes more into focus in Woolf’s later writing, showing, in Minow-Pinkney’s

terms, how “modernism and feminism constitute a single awareness and concern [and] her declaration of an urgent need for new fictional modes is a protest against Lacan’s symbolic order” (Minow-Pinkney 14). The seemingly self-contradictory argument of claiming a woman’s sentence and simultaneously defending an androgynous ideal, Minow-Pinkney explains by referring to the difference between the self-contained ‘I’ found in male poetry and her own multiple ‘I’. The female split self is consequential of the “splitting off of consciousness” (*AROO*: 96) experienced by women due to their position “at once outside and inside the dominant order” (Minow-Pinkney 10). Woman’s entry into the Oedipal phase is made complex by her necessary confrontation with phallogentricity in the form of language, which belongs to the symbolic realm. In other words, it is required that she identify with her father and the phallus in order to confront her mother and her own womanhood. This is not to say, however, that her origin is in a purely feminine semiotic state, “for it is situated in the pre-Oedipal phase, i.e., before sexual difference appears [and] the pre-Oedipal mother contains, for the baby, both masculinity and femininity” (Minow-Pinkney 21). The complex, multivalent position of woman is to Minow-Pinkney both a privilege and a curse which makes her inevitably androgynous, as “Woolfian androgyny involves a *dialectic* of symbolic and semiotic, of man and woman” (Minow-Pinkney 189).

Rachel Bowlby too makes reference to French feminism and psychoanalytic theory in her reading of *A Room of One’s Own*, distinguishing male and female writing as mentally “trained” and mentally “wandering” respectively. The feminine sentence is part of the language of the outsider, she *or* he excluded from patriarchal institutions, who thus develops a different kind of thinking and a writing, a sentence of her or his own. Representing a new view of style, structure and subject matter, feminine writing is “a challenge to the priority and interest of the mountain peaks of the present empire” of patriarchal literature. The feminine sentence discovers, uncovers and presents new land in the “half-lit atmosphere of a place not

so readily put on the general map” (Bowlby I: 183). Bowlby refers to Freud’s likening of girls’ discovery of their female sexuality to the discovery of an ancient civilisation lying in the historical shadow of ancient Greece. Understood as the exploration of a dark continent, a repressed and forcedly forgotten civilisation, “feminine writing, by whichever sex, is writing which breaks up, or is antecedent to, the conventions and boundaries of ‘civilized’ representation”. Thus, it is “not just one more literary field, but that form of writing which throws into question the status of all the rest” (Bowlby I: 184). As such, Bowlby connects the feminine sentence with the bisexual pre-Oedipal phase, and by association with the unconscious and the body. The fishing image in which Woolf’s essayist is interrupted by a Beadle is representative of the silencing of the submerged alternative voices trying to “write what cannot be written”, but also of the ungraspable, inherently ‘invisible’ nature of the feminine sentence which, like the fish, loses its potential once it is formulated, “brought into the light of representation at the price of assimilation and thus by the loss of what makes it different” (Bowlby I: 185). The marginal position of the feminine sentence and the female writer is a position of possibilities, as opposed to the fixed, obedient and trained kind of writer who “runs into [his] answer as a sheep runs into its pen” (*AROO*: 30). The question of the feminine sentence becomes a question of “Beadle or woman? Sheep or Woolf?” (Bowlby I: 189).

The question of the concept of androgyny, however, is not as dualistically simple. Bowlby explains the vision of the couple in the taxi cab as necessarily involving a third party, the visionary voyeur imagining the male-female ‘completeness’ at the safe “distance of a satisfying scene for the narrator looking on” (Bowlby I: 192). To Bowlby, this inherent intrusion of a male spectator fantasising about a natural union of the masculine and the feminine in the writer’s mind exposes Woolf’s androgynous vision as a reactionary, patriarchal concept.

Rado's Historicist Critique

A more recent approach, which also draws on psychoanalysis, but to a greater extent historicises the matter of Woolf's concept of androgyny, is the one taken by Lisa Rado. Attacking fellow critics for what she sees as an anachronistic misuse of the term 'androgyny', in that it seems based on postmodern feminist literary theory, Rado describes the various meanings of androgyny through history, to explain how "the modern androgyne imagination" must be read contextually and understood as indicative of a specific historical and cultural moment. The notion of 'imagination' is closely linked with 'authorship', and Rado shows how the history of authorship as involving a relation between feminine and masculine elements goes back to classical Greek literature but has changed over time.

For the poet or author to claim *authority* as a creative subject, it has at all times been important to defend his or her *inspiration* as establishing a link with "loci of ultimate authority" (Rado 2). These loci are culture-specific and vary in time, but have usually been in the form of some deity or divine force, such as God or Nature. This, to Rado, shows how art is a response to and a reflection of "the artist's need [not so much] to be inspired as to be empowered and authorized by the culture within which he or she creates" (Rado 2). Male poets have had a tradition of presenting their art as "transcriptions of divine utterance [and] formulations of spiritual truth" (Rado 3) through being possessed by "an imagined female entity with whom [they engage] in some sort of psycho-sexual relation" (Rado 3). Rado quotes Plato as equating inspiration with possession by a muse who will give the poet's narrative "considerable authenticity", as well as "underscore the poet's heroic manliness and virility" (Rado 3) by selecting him over other men. Inspiration and authorship are thus matters of divine seduction and external possession rather than products of an individual consciousness, "agency or talent" (Rado 4).

Approaching the Romantic period, the perception of inspiration and imagination

changes with the increasing awareness of a male consciousness as opposed to a female possessive muse, leading Alexander Pope to claim “he must ‘guide’ or control her; rather than lose himself in her honeyed lips” (Rado 6), to avoid feminisation. Rado also argues that Edmund Burke’s theory of the sublime is “a complex attempt at inhibiting the threat of incorporation and loss of control that for him certain aspects of nature, and specifically the female body, represent” (Rado 7). The Romantic poets went even further in incorporating and appropriating what they saw as threatening female elements into their male ‘imagination’, seeking to define and defend the borders of creativity as a masculine domain and “usurp the realm of sensibility to reestablish their artistic prerogative” (Rado 8). ‘Romantic androgyny’ may thus be seen as a reflection of “a new defensiveness about the uniqueness of authorship and the autonomy of the (male) artist in the creative process”, engulfing and silencing the female voice (Rado 9).

Relying upon the hierarchical opposition between a male artist-subject preserving himself against a female muse-object, this model of authorship and imagination became increasingly difficult to uphold as the general perception of gender relations and sexual categories changed dramatically around the turn of the twentieth century. Due to social tumult in such forms as suffrage, the Industrial Revolution and the First World War, as well as scientific studies of sex and sexuality, a sense of sexual indeterminacy was growing and the binary model of gender seemed less relevant as a new “three-sex” (Rado 11) model of sexual categories was proposed. While heavily debated as either a creative ideal or a figure of degeneracy, the notion of an androgynous third sex offered transcendence of the ‘two-sex’ categorisation in terms of an alternative imagination suited to the aesthetics of “male modernists searching for a means to restore their artistic prerogative while it provided female modernists with a way to transform their position from aesthetic objects to active creators” (Rado 13). Rado claims, however, that this was a dead end as regards artistic liberty, and that

feminist critics of the last couple of decades are mistaken in assuming that “the fusion of so-called masculine and feminine characteristics has an emancipatory potential” (Rado 13), reading “the modern androgyne imagination” with postmodern eyes, rather than considering “Woolf’s attraction to androgyny from the perspective of her cultural moment” (Rado 139).

Embracing the modern androgyne imagination would also be a risky act in the sense that “on the one hand it promises the possibility of virtually unlimited empowerment and inspiration, on the other hand, the model of an androgyne imagination at the same time threatens to annihilate the self from which it has been generated” (Rado 20). Rado argues that the ‘androgyne imagination’ failed as an escape from “the gendered crises of authority and inspiration” (Rado 20) and sees similarities with the concept of the *sublime*, in which threatening external elements are incorporated and made part of a “powerful and terrifying experience [...] as both an effect and a strategy rooted in a specifically psychosexual dynamic” (Rado 21). Nevertheless, Rado sees the modernists’ attempt at reaching “heightened states of consciousness” through androgyny as a failed act of *sublimation*. This failure is grounded in “a problem within the theory of the sublime: its assumption of a unique and unassailable subjectivity”, staging an illusion of control and the possibility of having a self. The idea of a heroic “androgynous sublime” was a last resort for “modern writers terrified of losing their artistic authority within the facelessness and genderlessness of twentieth-century mass culture”. The risk of losing themselves in an inherently unstable androgyne imagination shifting with the “cultural definitions of sexual categories” (Rado 22) seemed worth taking, even if it implied suppression of the body as well as an ironic distance to individual poetic empowerment, weakening the argument of androgyny as an artistic dogma.

This was Woolf’s attitude, Rado claims and argues that Woolf was ambivalent about her aesthetic stance all her life, “continually faced with the threat of psychic dissolution through the terrifying loss of boundaries that her androgynous model necessitates” (Rado 24).

Woolf's strategy of sublimation, her artistic restoring of her crushed consciousness after mental breakdowns by incorporating frightening experiences into some compositional whole, a "repository of meaning" (Rado 146), becomes a falsifying act, repressing "the real causes of the trouble: those anxieties about the vulnerability of both her artistic authority and her female body that the sledgehammer blows – those memories of male violence and cultural oppression – revive" (Rado 146). Woolf's androgynous vision presents itself to Rado as an attempt to incorporate "the destructive and powerful element – in her case the threat of modern patriarchal norms – within her own aesthetic framework" (Rado 146-147), in order to overcome her insecurities as a woman writer and a female, "corporeal self" (Rado 147). Rado also calls it an attempt to restore a sense of individual consciousness and authority, and disagrees with Marcus that Woolf's aesthetic represents "liberation from the ego"; "[r]ather than liberation *from* identity, Woolf [...] is striving *for* a woman to possess an identity" (Rado 149).

Rado's reading of Woolf's concept of androgyny and creativity in *A Room of One's Own* has clear implications for her interpretation of *To the Lighthouse*, to which we will return in the next chapter. The paradoxical nature of androgyny, presupposing a "primal unity", affirming the existence of a "transcendental subject while simultaneously denying it" (Rado 181), Rado sees as symptomatic of a growing suspicion of the possibility and validity of universal ideals which would express itself more clearly in the diversity of postmodern theory; "many modernist artists nevertheless seem to want to avoid admitting that there may never have been a center at all" (Rado 182). Although one can spot characteristics of deconstructive thinking and postmodern ideas in "the modern androgyne imagination", and while new modes of theorising on the topic may give interesting perspectives, the concept must be contextualised and understood in terms of the cultural premises of the day.

The Slipperiness of Androgyny: A Heterogeneous Debate

From Heilbrun to Bowlby, from Moi to Rado, what should one make of these very different readings in terms of Woolf's idea of androgyny? How do they relate to her concept of creativity and the creative subject? While it has been necessary to narrow down the number of debating contributors presented, they represent a wide range of interpretations, which, although they all express individual voices, can loosely be grouped into a few 'camps' of theoretical viewpoints. The debate is indeed heterogeneous, gathering voices from various parts of the theoretical landscape, agreeing or arguing with each other in terms of human subjectivity, sexual categories and artistic creativity. As we have seen, central contributors, such as Showalter and Moi, contrast sharply in their views of the 'stable ego' and to what degree it is responsible for and in control of its actions, and of *language*. While Moi may be said to represent a poststructuralist approach to Woolf, Marcus focuses on the collective aspect of her works, seeing her aesthetics as one of solidarity and connecting Woolf with a Marxist worldview. Minow-Pinkney, on her part, reads Woolf from a psychoanalytical perspective, and is less concerned with its political dimension, seeing the creative conflict as a confrontation and struggle with the phallogentricity of language, "a *dialectic* of symbolic and semiotic" (Minow-Pinkney 189). The most recent turn in the debate is a more historicising approach, putting Woolf's concept of creativity in the contemporary context of scientific studies of 'sexology'.

The theoretical perspectives mentioned provide valuable and varied insight into the concept of creativity as it is presented in *A Room of One's Own*. The various points of view have all been influential on my own reading of Woolf's essay, as I see interesting questions raised in each of them, however contradictory and fundamentally different they are in outlook. The heterogeneity of the discussion shows perhaps more than anything the slipperiness of the premises of the model of androgyny, as it "all too often escapes out of the grasp of critics and

settles back down into the sexual polarisation it is designed to avoid” (Wright 4), reinforcing the very gender stereotypes it allegedly set out to subvert. As mentioned, it has been much debated whether Woolf contradicts herself in promoting the ‘woman’s sentence’ the second before she asks the female writer not to think of her sex - in order to write pages “full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself” (*AROO*: 92).

Does she mean that a woman using all the faculties of the brain, not considering whether they are conventionally labelled ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’, will write differently from a man?

Would this view not imply an establishment of the metaphysical poles of sexual opposites?

I find Moi’s deconstructive reading of Woolf as a non-essentialist to be productive, as it opens up for an understanding of androgyny not as a transcendental, objective state of mind, but rather as a will and ability to see the potential of the human mind that “is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties” (*AROO*: 97), never locking oneself in one subject, or indeed, object position, whether it be as a woman, as an artist or as a female writer. The traditionally assumed correspondence between biological sex and sexually constructed gender is indeed debatable, as is the mutual exclusivity of masculinity and femininity. The deconstruction of the repressive binary masculine/feminine opposition by which we categorise human character traits and by extension different kinds of writing seems necessary in order to keep the body of literature alive and moving, and to give birth to new modes of artistic expression.

Moi’s postmodernist perspective stands in sharp contrast to the realist, close to anti-modernist argument of Showalter, evaluating Woolfian androgyny as political escapism and unwillingness to commit to the feminist cause. Opposing both Showalter and Moi is Rado’s view, criticising the tendency among feminists from the 1970s and onwards to read Woolf into their own political agenda or through a postmodernist lense. Historicising the concept, Rado explains Woolfian androgyny as a position emerging from a particular aesthetic tradition referring back to Coleridge and Shakespeare among others; at the same time, Woolf

was a part of her own contemporary context socially, artistically and politically, and this must be taken into consideration in order to understand Woolf's perception of the androgynous mind or "androgynous imagination".

I would defend Rado's criticism of the readiness to reading Woolf as a Kristevan postmodernist or a late twentieth-century feminist. The idea of androgyny has historical ties to male authors' explanation and understanding of their own creativity, as well as the transformation of female authors to become just that. Through the changing perspectives on creativity and androgyny in a new literary discourse, these women went from being mere objects of literature to becoming subjects of literary works. I think Rado is mistaken, however, when she concludes that androgyny is a dead end in creative concerns for authors applying the concept to their aesthetics, and that their 'androgynous imaginations' must be understood as signs of fear of losing authority in and confronting the insecurities of an increasingly fragmented world. Rather than a dead end for literary discourse, and rather than representing a 1970s feminist literary perspective disregarding Woolf's writing in the 1920s, her androgynous vision seems like a fertile response to the political and cultural factors of her own time. Belonging to the upper middle class while supporting Labour, along with feminist and pacifist organisations, and a general liberation of the individual, Woolf may well be described as a liberal humanist. As part of the project of modernity, Woolf, along with the liberal circle to which she belonged, promoted a new attitude to human relations; calling for the dissolution of the rigid English class system and for ways of governing that would respect the individuality of human beings as well as acknowledge their equality.

Androgyny as Dialogue: A Bakhtinian View

Woolf's political position and cultural context should be considered as backdrops in an exploration of her androgynous vision. I would argue, however, that her aesthetic argument

has a general humanist validity that makes purely historicising readings or exclusively feminist approaches to her works seem insufficient and even unjust. Woolf's relational understanding of creativity and specific comprehension of androgyny may require a different approach in order to have its potential more exhaustively explored. Leena Kore Schröder introduces Mikhail Bakhtin in two articles on Woolf's aesthetic agenda, "*Mrs Dalloway and the Female Vagrant*" and "'The Drag of the Face on the Other Side of the Page': Virginia Woolf, Bakhtin and Dialogue", showing how *Mrs Dalloway* in particular, but also other titles, relate to Bakhtin's ideas of *dialogue* and *dialogism*. A Bakhtinian approach to Woolf's works provides an explanation of androgyny as having validity beyond matters of history or aspects of sex and gender. A dehistoricising, aestheticising and *dialogical* perspective of the concept of androgyny contributes to the debate with a view to acknowledging the ethical basis of her artistic agenda, at the same time showing how Woolfian androgyny transcends its historical context as well as the somewhat myopic feminist perspective it has been subject to.

I have taken as the basis for my Bakhtinian reading the Russian philosopher and literary critic's essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" as published in the anthology *Art and Answerability*. Central to Bakhtin's *architectonics* is the activity of *perception*, understood as the subject's making meaningful wholes out of separate elements and *consuming* an object, much like an author's creating a text. The essay is based on the "dialogical paradox" (Holquist in introduction to *AA*: xxvi) of "the ethical event of being" (*AA*: 32) and the fact that every one of us experiences reality from a unique place in the world, but so do all other human beings; "we are all unique, but we are never alone" (Holquist in introduction to *AA*: xxvi). The realisation that each person occupies a unique point of perception entails a generality of subjectivity and a *convertibility* of the relation between subject and object, between *self* and *other*. The self's point of perception, its uniqueness or "excess" of seeing, exists only in relation to the perspective of the other and constitutes no

determinate place in space and time. In other words, every self has the potential to be an other. The otherness of the self implies a dialogic or interlocative imperative which means we must be flexible and change places with one another to see where we are; ‘I’ can see things ‘you’ cannot and vice versa, and “[w]e must share each other’s excess [of seeing] to overcome our mutual lack [of seeing]” (Holquist in introduction to *AA*: xxvi). The ethical relation of self to other, like the aesthetical author/hero connection, is a relationship of mutual consummation and co-authoring, creating a whole, a relative construct which acknowledges “the situatedness of perception and thus the uniqueness of the person, but it abhors all claims to oneness” (Holquist in introduction to *AA*: xxvi).

The interlocative imperative explains aesthetic activity as the “comprehensive reaction of the author to the hero [that] is founded on a necessary principle and has a productive, constructive character. Indeed, any relationship founded on a necessary principle has a creative, productive character” (*AA*: 5). The necessity of such relationships consists in a kind of dialogical empathy expressed in the author’s/self’s “projecting [him-/herself] into [the hero/other] and experiencing his [/her] life from within him [/her]” (*AA*: 25). This empathic or imaginative approach is the first step in aesthetic activity, according to Bakhtin:

Aesthetic activity proper actually begins at the point when we *return* into ourselves, when we *return* to our own place outside the suffering person, and start to form and consummate the material we derived from projecting ourselves into the other and experiencing him from within himself (*AA*: 26).

Aesthetic activity may thus be explained as an *event* in which the self and the other, the author and the hero *both* create a whole outside of which none of them could exist. Rather than underscoring the opposition between author and hero, such an aesthetic event signifies the *simultaneity* of the two parts, creating not a static segregation of their perceptual positions, but instead a dynamic and heterogeneous whole in which “one cannot be understood without the other. The resulting simultaneity is not a private *either/or*, but an inclusive *also/and*”

(Holquist in introduction to *AA*: xxiii). In Bakhtin's architectonics, the terms 'self' and 'other' are paired together not so much because they are perceptually contrastive as because of their convertible relation and simultaneous existence. The fact that the 'I' is an 'other' to the 'other' as an 'I' must be evident in all ethical events and all aesthetical activity. The creativity or "productive character" of the inherently interlocative Bakhtinian self thus consists in its following the ethical imperative or "necessary principle" of dialogue, informing not just aesthetic activity, but human action and interaction in general.

Analogous to the manner in which Bakhtinian dialogue "abhors all claims to oneness", "Woolf simply abandons the restrictive binary equation for one of heterogeneous multiplicity", Schröder points out, showing how "Bakhtin and Woolf both resist the canonical tendency [...] and celebrate the *disunity* of human language", and how they "promote a representation of human interchange that is neither reduced into, nor pronounced by a dominant, authoritative voice" (Schröder II: 111; 113). In Bakhtin's words, self relates to other as author to hero, in a "fundamental, aesthetically productive relationship [...] in which the author occupies an intently maintained position *outside* the hero" (*AA*: 14). A truly dialogic relation is signified by "the author's loving removal of himself from the field of the hero's life [and] the compassionate understanding and consummation of the event of the hero's life in terms of real cognition and ethical action by a detached, unparticipating beholder" (*AA*: 14-15). The speaker in *A Room of One's Own* represents something similar in insisting that her 'I' persona is "only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being" (*AROO*: 6) and that her name "is not a matter of any importance" (*AROO*: 7). She also warns how self-consciousness, whether it be based on sex, age or other defining categories, may prevent the author from having "her genius expressed whole and entire [...] She will write of herself where she should write of her characters" (*AROO*: 70). It would seem that the opposite of the androgynous, creative mind is the self-conscious, unproductive mind; indeed, according to Bakhtin,

[a]n author is the uniquely active form-giving energy that is manifested not in a psychologically conceived consciousness, but in a durably valid cultural product, and his active, productive reaction is manifested in the structures it generates [...] and in the selection of meaning-bearing features (AA: 8).

The Bakhtinian creative subject is the artist who “sees his own creating only in the object to which he is giving form”. In fact, “such is the nature of all active creative experiences: they experience their object and experience themselves *in* their object, but they do not experience the process of their own experiencing” (AA: 6-7). The subject’s position does not allow it to perceive itself from the outside, it cannot consummate itself the way it gives shape to the other, and this perceptual difference to Bakhtin demonstrates “a human being’s absolute need for the other, for the other’s seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity” (AA: 35-36). The Bakhtinian self/other connection is thus essentially relational and co-dependent.

It seems worthwhile to compare Woolf’s androgynous vision and Bakhtin’s necessary principle or dialogical imperative in terms of conditions of creativity, also the former might shed some light on the notion of a “necessary principle” of being. The essay speaker envisions a man and a woman entering a taxi-cab together, which then “glided off as if it were swept on by the current elsewhere” (AROO: 95). The event is described as resulting from a “force in things”, a “rhythmical order” which pleases the essayist’s mind in that it feels “as if, after having been divided, it had come together again in a natural fusion” (AROO: 96). The sight of the couple being swept away by the current makes her wonder whether thinking “of one sex as distinct from the other is an effort. It interferes with the unity of the mind” (AROO: 95). While this may appear to contradict Schröder’s stress on the “*disunity*” of Woolf’s aesthetic, other readings are possible. Woolf does not deny the existence of difference; rather, it seems that the androgynous mind is “less apt to make [sexual] distinctions” (AROO: 97), to distribute different human psychic capacities according to physical categories and to divide reality into strictly separate “different chambers” (AROO: 100). Rather than a resolution of two opposite ‘gendered mindsets’, the discussion and *dissolution* of a fixed gender dichotomy

may be Woolf's aim when she asks, "if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only?" (*AROO*: 87).

Androgynous thinking thus allows for a range and a change, or several changes in perspective, accepting the 'play of difference' and the *consistent inconsistency*, the unsettledness of the human mind. The "unity of the mind" then consists not in canonical, *monological* thinking, but on the contrary represents a mental state that is "resonant and porous [and that] is naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided" (*AROO*: 97); "some state of mind in which one could continue without effort because nothing is required to be held back" (*AROO*: 96). The unified, androgynous mind is thus a mind that is open to difference, or in Bakhtin's terms, to *otherness*, and that lets down the boundaries of the separate chambers so that the current may flow freely and according to its natural rhythm. Could it be this "naturally creative" state of mind that results from Bakhtin's "necessary principle", the dialogical imperative? Does the "force of things" demonstrate this necessity of human existence, gathering parts together in a "fully fertilized", "fully developed mind" (*AROO*: 97) transcending its separate chambers?

The self that enters into dialogue with an other, the author who writes of her characters rather than herself seems to manifest the androgynous mind as Woolf sees it, and the imperatively dialogical self as described by Bakhtin, promoting empathy and exposing the idea of absolute identity, of absolute boundaries between people, as an illusion. The position of the creative subject appears to lie in "the author's loving removal of himself from the field of the hero's life" as well as in the dispensing of "the dominance of the letter 'I' and the aridity, which, like the giant beech tree, it casts within its shade. Nothing will grow there" (*AROO*: 99). This relational understanding of Woolfian androgyny may become clearer when read in the context of the two novels around which the next chapters revolve. Through the exploration of character relations within and across three of Woolf's texts; *A Room of One's*

Own, Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse; this thesis will endeavour to shed some new light on Woolf's concept of creativity and androgyny from a dialogical perspective.

Chapter Two

“Alone Together”: Mrs. Peters’ Hat and the Perpetual Movement of Clouds

“It is the hat that matters most” (*MD*: 95), Septimus Warren Smith is told by his future wife Lucrezia, a short while before he proposes to her in a fret of panic over his loss of the ability to feel after having served in the war. The hat they make together a few years later, right before Septimus’ suicide, stands as a substantial result of an attempt to overcome separateness in a space in which they can exist and create “alone together” (*MD*: 158) The hat seems to express and preserve something of them both: having sat “separated into different chambers; not a sound carried from one to the other” (*AROO*: 100) during Septimus’ fits of madness, they come together in ‘a room of their own’, a place in which to communicate and create not simply a hat for Mrs. Peters, but a work of art. “An aesthetic event can take place only when there are two participants present”, Mikhail Bakhtin says in his essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”; “it presupposes two noncoinciding consciousnesses” (*AA*: 20), who must then engage in a *dialogue*. An isolated consciousness cannot produce; aesthetic activity is always an “expression of a *relationship*” (Dentith: 12). Mrs. Peters’ hat is only one example of “artistic form and meaning emerg[ing] *between people*” (Dentith: 13) in *Mrs Dalloway*, showing how the relationship between self and other is foundational to all human interaction, including aesthetic activity. This chapter will investigate a few other examples of human relations in the novel, the degree to which they are dialogic and whether they may be seen as creatively productive.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, the most debated relationship as an instance of artistic mentality and doubleness of personality is the bond between Septimus Smith and Clarissa Dalloway. They never meet, but seem nevertheless to engage in a sort of communication or dialogue in that they mirror each other in terms of mental reflection. Both imbued with a deeply sceptical

attitude to the codes and conventions surrounding them, neither feels part of the society from which Septimus ultimately breaks away and in which Clarissa chooses to continue life. Each feeling caged in their respective rooms, Septimus concludes the only option of escape is to plunge to his death through the window, whereas Clarissa, pondering the young man's suicide, chooses to return from her private chamber to her party, where her guests are waiting, among them her two former 'loves', Peter Walsh and Sally Seton, now Lady Rosseter.

Peter's feeling of rejection has complicated his relationship to Clarissa ever since he proposed to her directly after having interrupted "the most exquisite moment of [Clarissa's] whole life" (*MD*: 38); being kissed at the age of eighteen by Sally at Bourton. Defensively fidgeting with his phallic pocket-knife during his conversations with the married Clarissa, Peter seems to reveal his self-consciousness and need for reassurance of his ego "as a unique *I-for-myself* in distinction to all other human beings" (*AA*: 37). Monotonously and *monologically* replaying the "terrible scene which he believed had mattered more than anything in the whole of his life" (*MD*: 69), Clarissa's refusal to marry him, Peter has spent thirty years "trying to explain [Clarissa]" (*MD*: 83) and her choice to marry Richard Dalloway instead of himself. Considering himself a free soul, a "solitary traveller" in the convention-bound, conservative high society circles of Clarissa, Peter perceives Clarissa to have become his opposite; a "mere hostess" (*MD*: 83) who has left her ideals, denied herself 'her real self', her youthful love of life and a passionate relationship with Peter in which they would go "in and out of each other's minds without any effort" (*MD*: 69). He fails to see, however, that he himself comes forward as a representative of colonial Empire, depending on people's praise and judging by the codes of the patriarchal society that he claims to reject. His 'travelling' expresses a wish to return, to retreat to a motherly "great figure" who will let him "blow to nothingness with the rest" (*MD*: 63). Peter's love for the "purely feminine" (*MD*: 83) Clarissa reveals itself as a possessive passion, seeking the power to judge the object of affection

precisely as an *object* from which he distances himself, rather than another *subject*. It may not be her own ideals, but *Peter's* ideals that Clarissa has left.

Jacob Littleton explains Clarissa's dispassionate choice of husband as consequential of her being a nonbeliever as well as her rejection of "society's common props against the void: Walsh's passion, Kilman's religion, Bradshaw's Proportion"; the passionate Peter's judgment of her as superficially nonsensical in her hostessing "militates against his understanding her as thoroughly as she understands him. His occasional insights are ruined by complete misunderstandings grounded in his perceptions of what she should be" (Littleton 50), and what she should be in relation to *him*. Peter's self-consciousness, despite Clarissa's attraction to him, seems significant in her resolution to marry the rather dull Richard Dalloway. Being less passionate and less intense, Richard offers her the space she needs to think her own private thoughts, her "secret beliefs" (Littleton 46) about her parties; that they are "an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps" (*MD*: 134). This nonjudgmental, 'art for art's sake' view she cannot share with anyone close to her, least of all Peter, who would not have accepted her parties as anything but shallow snobbery, who would neither have allowed Clarissa her privacy nor have understood her belief that "there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect" (*MD*: 131).

Clarissa's absolute need for a private space, a room of her own, might seem to be in opposition to her love of life as creation, as a combination of separate parts into a communal whole. Littleton's view of Clarissa as an artist whose aesthetic perspective reflects and extends to her views on "the ethical event of being" (*AA*: 32) and whose "artistry is the essential key to understanding her character" (Littleton 36), may shed light upon Clarissa's social gatherings as artistic events, as places for people to come together in dialogue, where there is no domineering, authoritative voice, neither of love, religion nor "Proportion"; "she

would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that” (*MD*: 9). Such concepts of implicit power and ego struggles are uninspiring to Clarissa, appreciating existence without judgment; “[w]hat she liked was simply life” (*MD*: 133), and life as heteroglot at that, letting forward a multitude of voices and viewpoints. In Leena Kore Schröder’s words, “Clarissa is thinking both in the solitary seclusion of self, and in social interaction with the multiple other” (Schröder II: 114). Demonstrating how “a second participant is implicated in the event of self-contemplation” (*AA*: 33), Clarissa’s interior monologue pondering the nature of herself and her parties is structured as a dialogue, positioning and negotiating itself according to others’ perspectives and revealing the polyphonic and multcentred quality of language, how it is fundamentally dialogic and thus constantly renewed and ever “overpopulated – with the intentions of others” (Bakhtin³ in Schröder II: 113).

Clarissa is also in constant dialogue through renegotiations of her past, of the days she spent at Bourton at the age of eighteen, when choices were made that would decide the course of the rest of her own, and perhaps other people’s lives. She has given birth to Elizabeth, who is now the same age as Clarissa was at her marriage, and whom people are starting to compare to “poplar trees [and] garden lilies” (*MD*: 147). Riding the bus around London, Elizabeth ponders her future by ‘thinking back through her mother’ as it were, and how she does not share Clarissa’s fascination with high society London life. Elizabeth finds it “dreary” and the compliments paid to her a “burden”; “for she so much preferred being left alone to do what she liked in the country” (*MD*: 147). She is, however, excited about the constant movement of the bus, offering her stunning, shifting viewpoints and a multitude of possible destinations. Thinking she will become a doctor or a farmer, quite contrary to her mother who has no formal education, and feeling herself to be quite a “pioneer”, Elizabeth opts to go where “no

³Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel”, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Texas University Press, 1990), pp. 293-94.

Dalloways came down [...] daily”; to the Strand, where Septimus and Rezia have sat on a bench a few hours before. Then, hearing her mother’s voice in her head, knowing Clarissa would not want her daughter to wander off alone, Elizabeth decides she “must go home. She must dress for dinner” (*MD*: 150). She only just finishes a line of thought on the clouds coming in over the Strand so that “the omnibuses suddenly lost their glow” (*MD*: 152), before she herself mounts one of them heading back in time for her mother’s party. Elizabeth muses that despite the clouds’ having “all the appearance of settled habitations assembled for the conference of gods above the world, there was a perpetual movement among them”, and that “[f]ixed though they seemed at their posts, at rest in perfect unanimity, nothing could be fresher, freer, more sensitive superficially than the snow-white or gold-kindled surface; to change, to go, to dismantle the solemn assemblage was immediately possible” (*MD*: 152). Elizabeth imagines the clouds to be of a shifting, yet solid quality, so that “now they struck light to earth, now darkness” (*MD*: 152), mirroring Septimus’ thoughts on the light and shadow which “now made the Strand grey, now made the omnibuses bright yellow” (*MD*: 153). They are both at this moment reflecting Clarissa’s aesthetic of ‘steady non-fixity’; “[s]he would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that” (*MD*: 8).

Clarissa seems to express a relational attitude, feeling that

to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind the counter – even trees (*MD*: 167).

She employs ‘arboreal’ metaphors throughout the novel, imagining human existence as a series of significant moments that are connected like “buds on the tree of life” (*MD*: 31).

Clarissa’s view of trees as a symbol of natural creativity, of mental fertility and a plethora of perspectives growing and flowering on the same branch, seems to mirror Septimus’ feeling that “trees were alive”, his sense of “the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body” (*MD*: 24). Listening to a nursemaid sitting nearby, he muses that the human voice

“can quicken trees into life” (*MD*: 24), suggesting a connection of mutual inspiration, a sort of dialogue between human beings and plants. This might seem to call for a view of Clarissa’s social gatherings as ethical and aesthetic ‘gardening’, creating a coherent, harmonious whole in which every ‘tree’ has its part to play in accordance with the others. Such compositions would leave no room for “the dominance of the letter ‘I’ and the aridity, which, like the giant beech tree, it casts within its shade” (*AROO*: 99). Nevertheless, Clarissa’s party is, in fact, a celebration of one, authoritative individual: the Prime Minister. Although he is described sparsely and his presence is rarely foregrounded, the fact that his prominent position lays the premise for Clarissa’s party seems to contradict the idea of a dialogical whole originating in androgynous, heterogeneous unity.

Moreover, within Clarissa’s social scheme, Elizabeth is consigned to occupy the space as a delicately decorative poplar tree. Neither she nor Septimus seem content with their places in the post-war ‘garden’ in which they live, feeling condemned by their cultural contexts of sex and social class. For Septimus, expectations of masculinity have led him to join the army and fight in the war, in which he has lost his best friend, possibly lover, and along the way his ability to feel, to come to terms with his experience in a social setting which does not accept his ‘weakness’. Madness and eventually suicide seem to be the consequence and his last desperate resort. For Elizabeth, being born a girl in an upper class family means people expecting her to be delicate like a flower, with few ambitions other than being decorative, marrying well and embracing her position as a wealthy hostess having no opinions of her own. At the party, even her father does not recognise the girl looking “so lovely in her pink frock” as “his Elizabeth” (*MD*: 212), objectifying and thinking of his daughter in possessive terms and bereaving her of her dream of “being alone in the country with her father and the dogs” (*MD*: 147).

Belonging to defined layers of society, lower and upper middle class respectively, Septimus and Elizabeth feel judged and condemned by the social codes expecting them to submit to certain conventional forms of masculinity and femininity. In fact, as Schröder points out, the only person appearing to resist “the imperialist narrative” (Schröder I: 337) is the female vagrant, whose “old bubbling burbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages [...] fertilising, leaving a damp stain” (*MD*: 89), is sung in a “voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth” (*MD*: 88). Is it the voice of this old beggar woman, likened by Peter Walsh to a “wind-beaten tree for ever barren of leaves” (*MD*: 88), that has the power to quicken other trees, other minds into life? Challenging and living outside social conventions of sex, age and class, the female vagrant with her ageless, sexless voice appears reminiscent of “the androgynous mind [that] is resonant and porous; that [...] transmits emotion without impediment; that [...] is naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided” (*AROO*: 97). Her mere existence seems subversive of the authoritative narrative of English society, and her strangely alien, yet familiar song Schröder associates with Bakhtin’s notion of the *carnavalesque*, abolishing social hierarchies, exposing their absurdity and “clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of [them]” (Bakhtin⁴ in Schröder I: 342). With no name nor home, existing on the outskirts of social convention, she is pitied by people as a poor creature, but with her anonymous, uncertain status, “the concept of personality is opened up, pluralised, blurred” (Schröder I: 341). This allows for a dialogic self that is not limited to certain categories or roles in the imperialist narrative, which the female vagrant seems to escape by having a voice of her own.

Clarissa’s ‘social garden’ may be seen as the momentary manifestation of “the unseen part of us, which spreads wide” (*MD*: 167) as well as her belief that “on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was

⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 474 (no references to editor, publisher and year of publication given).

positive, of the trees at home” (*MD*: 9). Her attempt is to create a lasting moment expressing humanity as a whole, a forest or a garden in which all the trees are somehow connected; above or below ground; in life and/or after death; the visible is linked with the invisible, the roots interweaving and consummating each other in a web spreading below the surface, so that “the unseen might survive” (*MD*: 167). Clarissa’s view may be said to simultaneously defy and embrace death, destabilising the absolute oppositions of life and death, of ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’. She cannot convince herself that “death ended absolutely” (*MD*: 9), recalling Bakhtin’s dialogic perspective on linguistic meaning and human relations, that “nothing is absolutely dead”; meaning is created and recreated in an endless dialogue, and “there is neither a first word nor a last word” (Bakhtin, *Estetika*, in Holquist 39). In the context of trees as symbolic of the ever dialogic connections between people, Septimus’ idea that “[m]en must not cut down trees” (*MD*: 26) seems metaphorical of and relevant as an ethical standpoint promoting human empathy. Clarissa’s sense of connecting with others, her feeling “part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist” shows her belief in the complexity and multidimensionality of human existence and experience; “but it spread ever so far, her life, herself” (*MD*: 10).

The ongoing conflict of separate vs. collective, of singular vs. plural, of unique vs. anonymous inside Clarissa’s mind gives Peter the impression that she is ‘wooden’, in the meaning of ‘frigid’, someone who refuses to take a stand and seeks to cover her shallowness with delicate manners and exquisite parties. Peter’s perception of Clarissa as wooden and thus infertile (*MD*: 66), a dead tree so to speak, seems to be in opposition to his own dream of a feminine, fertile figure “made of sky and branches” (*MD*: 63), as well as to Clarissa and Septimus’ imagining trees as symbolic of fertility, as “alive”. Peter also appears to equate anonymity with repressed emotions and lack of personality, of personal opinions expressed,

whereas Clarissa, contemplating the suicide of Septimus, thinks that “[a] thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved” (*MD*: 202). She feels somehow similar to him, thinking of the nameless “young man” she never knew as someone who has been true to his individuality, his uniqueness, by choosing a dimension of absolute anonymity; death. Anonymity may here be understood as freedom not to be pinned down to one view, one category, of escaping the ‘imperialist imperative’, the conquest of “Bradshaw’s Proportion”; “[d]eath was an attempt to communicate [...] There was an embrace in death” (*MD*: 202).

Death is not Clarissa’s choice, however; “she must go back. She must assemble” (*MD*: 204). Her way of protecting herself from the conquering nature of ‘void-fillers’ such as love, religion or ‘proportion’ is different from Septimus’ in its solution of the struggle between the uniqueness and the anonymity of the mist. Whereas Septimus’ sensitivity to other people and their expectations has disabled his relating to them and ‘sensing’ them, Clarissa’s perceived connection to other people’s existence makes her feel she can only go on, survive, by acknowledging the interchanging and mutually consummating, ‘co-authoring’ quality of human relations. Like the mist is lifted by the trees, Clarissa needs “people, always people, to bring it out” (*MD*: 86), to create her feeling of being herself, of being alive. The same way she composes her parties, Clarissa picks out flowers to create the intended harmony in which each individual blossom has its part to play, and she feels as if “this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up” (*MD*: 14).

The ‘misty’ quality of existence, however, seems to hold a promise as well as a threat to the individual; it becomes blurry, “shapeless”; “Is that a tree? No, it is a woman” (*AROO*: 98). This seems particularly delimiting to Elizabeth, whom people see as a poplar tree rather than the grown woman she soon is. Clarissa’s picking out flowers, as her party-planning in

general, seems to serve as an act of leaving out, of ‘transcending’ intrusive elements, such as Elizabeth’s teacher Doris Kilman, whom Clarissa does not like and whose influence on her daughter she suspects. Highly religious, as well as outspokenly socialist in her views, Miss Kilman represents to Clarissa the wish to ‘convert’ that she detests and finds to be a central component in the “cruellest things in the world” (*MD*: 138); love and religion. Observing Miss Kilman’s possessive passion for Elizabeth, Clarissa asks if she “ever tried to convert anyone herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves?” (*MD*: 138). The answer to this rhetorical question is less clear, however, and it seems legitimate to enquire whether Clarissa truly acknowledges her daughter’s otherness, and whether her parties really have the ethical dimension that the dialogical relation suggests.

Woolf herself declared she was “merely a sensibility” (Woolf⁵ in Minow-Pinkney: 59) when she wrote, refusing authoritative narration and making room for her characters rather than her ‘personal agenda’. While this thesis deals with connections between the characters rather than Woolf’s authorial relation to them, it might be relevant here to ask whether Woolf’s aesthetic outlook is reflected in Clarissa’s party-planning and way of life? Understanding Woolf’s aesthetic in Bakhtinian terms and associating the ‘author’ with the ‘self’ and the ‘hero’ with the ‘other’ may lead to an interesting perspective on Clarissa’s social gatherings as artistic, authorial compositions. In this context, it seems doubtful whether her parties express “the author’s outside position in relation to the hero, the author’s loving removal of [her]self from the field of the hero’s life, [her] clearing of the whole field of life for the hero and his existence” (*AA*: 14), providing fertile soil in which the other can grow. It appears more likely that Clarissa’s ‘aesthetic’ intention may work as a “giant beech tree” (*AROO*: 99), throwing a long shadow over Elizabeth’s part of ‘the garden’, consigning her to the position as ornamental poplar tree and thereby “block[ing her] fountain of creative energy

⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer’s Diary*, edited by Leonard Woolf (1953), London, 1969.

and shor[ing] it within narrow limits” (*AROO*: 99). Her designing of a social composition which leaves no space for Elizabeth to live as she wishes to, “being left alone to do what she liked in the country” (*MD*: 147), is in fact a violation of Clarissa’s own ‘nonjudgmental’ ethic or aesthetic.

Consigned to the poplar tree position, it is doubtful whether Elizabeth can flourish within the frames of Clarissa’s aesthetic. Can she escape the object position and somehow be recognised by her mother and father as a *subject*, or will she be “killed by a [phallic] falling tree” like Clarissa’s sister Sylvia, “a girl too on the verge of life” (*MD*: 85)? It may strike one as a bit ironic that her sister’s death, for which she blames her father, is what steers Clarissa in the direction of her “atheist’s religion of doing good for the sake of goodness” (*MD*: 85) in a composition which has no room for her own daughter. While employing a fluid style within a “conventional narrative form of third person and past tense”, Woolf’s “writing tries to give voice to the specificity of a female subject who is outside any principle of identity-to-self” (Minow-Pinkney 83), Makiko Minow-Pinkney argues. It remains dubious whether the same thing can be said of Clarissa’s parties; the social level on which they operate seems to require a specific kind of selfhood, but leave little space for the specific subjectivity of Elizabeth.

It appears that the only female subject whose voice is allowed its specificity, remaining as she does “outside any principle of identity-to-self”, is the old vagrant singing in the street. Her song is sung outside the context of Clarissa’s parties, of society as divided along the lines of class and gender, breaking the laws of linguistic meaning syntactically and semantically and thus remaining utterly indecipherable to the rational mind, “alien and [perhaps] critical” (*AROO*: 96). Perceived as the helpless sound of a “poor creature” (*MD*: 90), the vagrant’s voice nevertheless permeates people’s minds, “soaking through the knotted roots” of human relations, of pity and judgment, singing of love and “fertilising, leaving a damp stain” (*MD*: 89). Just as there is “neither a first word nor a last word” (Bakhtin, *Estetika*,

in Holquist 39) in the endless dialogue of meaning, the beggar woman's song is without "beginning or end" (*MD*: 88). The voice of the "wind-beaten tree for ever barren of leaves which lets the wind run up and down its branches" (*MD*: 88) is simultaneously an "invincible thread of sound [...] winding up clean beech trees and issuing in a tuft of blue smoke among the topmost leaves" (*MD*: 90-91), exemplifying the dialogic principle of mutual permeability.

One might ask if a truly dialogic relation is only possible for those who stand completely outside the social system of class and gender, and who do not perform as social 'I's on the level of community at which Clarissa's parties take place and where people such as Elizabeth are essentially objectified. Rather than a performing social 'I', the vagrant and her voice seem expressive of a "mere sensibility" that permeates and is permeated in a continuous dialogue with its surroundings. Singing her song outside Clarissa's social garden, the "wind-beaten tree" (*MD*: 88) "has no place within society but wanders freely as a tramp" (Minow-Pinkney 73). Does this freedom protect "the privacy of [her] soul" (*MD*: 139), as Clarissa muses Septimus has done by throwing himself out of the window, into the absolute anonymity of death? Septimus and the vagrant share the inability to relate to people on the social level; they have their own voices but cannot express themselves in words that are recognised by others as meaningful. Septimus' plunge into "nothingness" is interpreted by Clarissa as an attempt to overcome and escape Bradshaw's "proportion", an ego-driven, monologic force like love and religion. Ridding himself of all social attachment, Septimus also abandons his own ego but preserves the "thing [...] that mattered" (*MD*: 202); the privacy of his soul. Septimus' and the vagrant's "attempt[s] to communicate" (*MD*: 202) in the forms of death and vagrancy respectively represent states of utter solitude on the social level, though the novel seems to suggest an ultimate union of human relation beneath the veil of social 'I's, beyond what we perceive as everyday life.

Nevertheless, does *Mrs Dalloway* offer any alternatives for Elizabeth? Within the framework of the novel, can she flourish as anything but a poplar tree? As a whole, the narrative does not appear to pose any options for her to voice her opinion in a language that her mother and father can recognise, without reducing her to a child or transforming her into a poplar tree. Can Elizabeth gain her own voice, her own “invincible” sound “winding up clean beech trees”, or must she remain in the shadow of such trees, running the risk of getting beaten down by them? Is it possible for Elizabeth to express herself *without* stepping outside the social space and into the anonymity of vagrancy or madness? The quiet life of mere existence that she dreams of appears out of the question within the limits of Clarissa’s parties, requiring a kind of social ‘I’ or selfhood which Elizabeth cannot seem to construct either for herself or for others.

Deborah Guth suggests that Clarissa’s vision of a transcendent social harmony is essentially a ritual of self-deception, turning people, Clarissa as well as the other ‘components’, into symbols, in an act freeing them but simultaneously reducing them as individuals. Elizabeth does not understand her mother’s “secret beliefs” and her way of protecting and expressing them by embracing the financially and socially extravagant, but personally anonymous lifestyle of a society hostess. While one may argue, as Littleton does, that Clarissa’s parties represent subversion of the patriarchal power relations of subject and object within a socially conventional narrative structure, this ‘method’ does not suit Elizabeth, who is of a new generation providing her with other opportunities.

Elizabeth’s own voice lacks representation in the social ‘scheme’ of *Mrs Dalloway*, and such representation might be what Woolf seeks to provide through *A Room of One’s Own*, discussing the female sentence and the androgynous mind as expressed in a voice that has “no age or sex” and is not bound to traditional categorisations of gender and class. Such a voice may suggest for a woman, “whatever her mother might say, to become either a farmer or a

doctor”, without turning back feeling “it was much better to say nothing about it” (*MD*: 150) because of fear that no one would understand or recognise this plan. In 1928, at the time of the publication of *A Room of One’s Own*, Elizabeth would have been 23 years old and supposedly have had “certain advantages which women of far greater gift lacked even half a century [before]” (*AROO*: 91). She would clearly have been part of Woolf’s target audience lecturing on “Women and Fiction”, the latter of which urges girls to receive an education and to look beyond the limits set for them by marriage. *A Room of One’s Own* may be said to go further where Elizabeth stops to return to her mother; it is an insistent wish to continue her quest and to truly “stimulate what lay slumbrous, clumsy and shy on the mind’s sandy floor, to break surface” (*MD*: 150).

Elizabeth’s wanderings appear to anticipate the essayist’s strolling around Oxbridge. While the former walks around on tiptoe, as if she was “exploring a strange house by night with a candle, on edge lest the owner should suddenly fling wide his bedroom door and ask her business” (*MD*: 150-151), the latter, having let her thought sway “hither and thither among the reflections and the weeds” of a great sea of ideas, finds herself stepping outside the main track and “walking with extreme rapidity across a grass plot” (*AROO*: 7), only to be intercepted by a Beadle indignantly explaining that “[t]his was the turf; there was the path” (*AROO*: 8). The multi-named speaker for whom “I” is only a convenient term” (*AROO*: 6) seems nevertheless to have come a little step further than Elizabeth, who is still trapped in a certain perception of women as “looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (*AROO*: 37), expected to embrace their ‘poplar position’ in the shadow of a twice as large “giant beech tree”. The special kind of selfhood, or womanhood rather, that is demanded of Elizabeth, is what prevents her from going “a little farther” (*MD*: 149). It seems that only “when womanhood had ceased to be a protected occupation” (*AROO*: 42), can she dare to follow the thought of having a profession

and a room of her own, a frame of mind in which she can “continue without effort because nothing is required to be held back” (*AROO*: 96).

The disinterested outlook Elizabeth has on the social level of her mother’s parties, on gender roles and class conventions, Clarissa interprets, and perhaps misinterprets, as immaturity; somewhat like Peter deems Clarissa “the perfect hostess”, Clarissa perceives Elizabeth to be “a perfect baby” (*MD*: 151). She finds this “charming”, however, suggesting that immaturity in women is a good quality. Clarissa nevertheless worries that Elizabeth does not care more about the compliments she receives; “[e]very man fell in love with her, and she was really awfully bored” (*MD*: 148). Her boredom seems not so much a result of sexual innocence as of some kind of unconsciousness of sex, expressing the idea that to think “of one sex as distinct from the other is an effort” (*AROO*: 95). But Clarissa’s social scheme will not let her daughter ‘forget’ her sex, and cannot explain her “odd friendship with Miss Kilman” (*MD*: 148) as anything but an expression of pity on Elizabeth’s behalf.

At the same time, in this context Clarissa herself seems to have ‘forgotten’ her “completely disinterested” (*MD*: 36) relation with Sally Seton at Bourton, which resulted in “the most exquisite moment of her whole life” (*MD*: 38). Sally’s wild nature and bold behaviour was utterly fascinating to Clarissa, who felt their relationship to have a certain “purity” and “integrity”; “a quality which could only exist between women” (*MD*: 37). Sally and Clarissa’s companionship appears ‘pure’ and free of the tension and aggression of the sexual power struggle within a man-woman relationship. Sally’s inspirational effect on Clarissa seems profound politically and socially, even aesthetically in the sense that Sally’s picking “hollyhocks, dahlias – all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together” (*MD*: 36), recalls Clarissa’s social gathering; “[h]ere was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair [...] and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it” (*MD*: 133-134).

Their relationship seems unresolved, however; ever since Peter interrupted their kissing and Clarissa promptly decided to marry Richard Dalloway, much to the horror of both Sally and Peter, Clarissa has barely spoken to either of them. Now Sally, with whom Clarissa “spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe” (*MD*: 37) and “meant to found a society to abolish private property, and actually had a letter written, though not sent out” (*MD*: 36), has become a wealthy society wife and the mother of five sons. In this context, Clarissa’s feeling that “[t]he whole world might have turned upside down” (*MD*: 38) by Sally’s kiss, proves false; rather than letting the kiss be “the revelation” (*MD*: 39) that causes her to break with the conventions she and Sally claim to rebel against, Clarissa lets “her moment of happiness” (*MD*: 39) be disturbed by Peter’s “jealousy; his hostility” (*MD*: 39), so that the kiss remains “something infinitely precious, wrapped up” (*MD*: 39). Peter’s “determination to break into their companionship” (*MD*: 39) prevents Clarissa and Sally from expressing their love for each other, and somewhat like the letter they have written, but never sent, their mutual affection ends up being “an inner meaning *almost* expressed” (*MD*: 35, italics mine). Could they fully have expressed their emotions, their ‘meanings’ and continued their relationship? Would they still have become Mrs Dalloway and Lady Rosseter, the latter seeing Elizabeth as “a lily by the side of a pool” (*MD*: 211) and deeming Clarissa a snob caring only for the good opinion of her high society guests as she rushes away from her old friends at the party?

Clarissa does not tell anyone when she withdraws to her room after hearing of Septimus’ suicide. Upon parting the curtains she is surprised by a momentary ‘mirror image’; “in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her” (*MD*: 203). Clarissa has seen her before; the old woman would be “climbing upstairs” where she would “gain her bedroom, part her curtains, and disappear again into the background” (*MD*: 138). Clarissa muses how the other woman’s unconsciousness of being watched expresses something “solemn” that must not be destroyed by love and religion; “the privacy of the soul” (*MD*: 139). Associated

with Clarissa's reflection, the old woman's straight stare seems to confront Clarissa with her own choices and alternatives as she ponders Septimus' death. The scene seems to exemplify Bakhtin's thought that "a second participant is implicated in the event of self-contemplation" (AA: 33), as well as his idea that "before a mirror [we] try to find an axiological position in relation to ourselves [...] we try to vivify ourselves and give form to ourselves – out of the other" (AA: 32-33). Clarissa feels an affinity and likeness with Septimus and is even "glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living" (MD: 204). Septimus throws himself away, "vigorously, violently" out of his room, the walls of which confine and seek to 'convert' him, upon noticing that "[c]oming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him" (MD: 164). This old man descending the staircase parallels the old woman ascending her stairs in that they both appear to confront Septimus and Clarissa with their potential older selves, though they clearly have different effects upon their decisions concerning their participation in society and their roles at the social level.

Septimus' way of preserving the privacy of his soul through absolute disconnection socially is not the way of Clarissa, who seems to seek this kind of preservation through social connection, through her party, rather than by letting herself "blow to nothingness with the rest" (MD: 63) in death. The sense of a universal sphere of belonging, of equal validity and respect for other people's otherness, Clarissa seeks to achieve in life as a social event. She acknowledges the importance and admires the solemnity of personal privacy in human character, but sees the individual as necessarily longing for belonging with other people through dialogue. This longing expresses a selfless rather than an egocentric quality; dialogue cannot take place within relationships of possessive love or religious conversion, as such relations do not respect the otherness of others. As the old lady turns off her light and disappears again into the background, Clarissa decides "she must go back. She must assemble" (MD: 204).

By “projecting” herself into an other, by putting herself in Septimus’ place, Clarissa seems to have taken the “first step in aesthetic activity” (AA: 25). According to Bakhtin, aesthetic activity begins the moment “we *return* into ourselves, when we *return* to our place outside the suffering person, and start to form and consummate the material we derived from projecting ourselves into the other and experiencing him from within himself” (AA: 26). Does Clarissa’s returning to her party signify a return into herself and thus fulfilment of Bakhtinian aesthetic ideals? While this question will be discussed later on in the present chapter, Clarissa’s return to her party expresses a hopeful defiance of the idea that true dialogue, as a mutual connection and respect for the otherness and “privacy” of an other, is only possible through absolute disconnection from her lifestyle, or indeed, from life itself.

Nevertheless, Clarissa’s attempt still suggests that the dialogic relation is something in essence inaccessible, something that defies the rational mind, in that she takes an observer’s or overseer’s approach to her party. As she withdraws to her room, she becomes a true outsider to the party, but seems to go into a wordless dialogue with the woman in the house opposite hers. The “odd affinities” between them recall the emotional effect on Peter and Rezia of the indecipherable song of the vagrant. About to cross the street they become aware of the “voice of no age or sex” (MD: 88), seeming to connect with some deep emotional level with which they are usually not in touch; the “ancient song” (MD: 89) reminds them of something timeless that is only available in a short moment, recalling the idea that “[l]ife in the present instant is a narrow plank reaching over the abyss of death between the nothingness of past and future” (Miller 1993: 52). The vagrant’s voice does not belong to life as they know it, and though she is clearly alive, her way of living does not make sense as definable, certain, accessible along conventional lines and ‘rules’ of what life is and what it should be about. Her openness is interpreted as “nothingness”, her words are heard on the logical level as nonsense. Still, the vagrant’s voice seems to make “all peering inquisitive eyes” and all

self-assertive 'I's of the "passing generations" disappear, vanish, "like leaves, to be trodden under, to be soaked and steeped and made mould of by that eternal spring" (*MD*: 90), so that Peter and Rezia appear able to grasp the purpose of her asking, "and if some one should see, what matter they?" (*MD*: 90). It might be this question that starts permeating Rezia's relation to Septimus, so that they are able to create Mrs. Peter's hat "alone together".

The vagrant's song, however, the "invincible thread of sound [...] issuing in a tuft of blue smoke among the topmost leaves" (*MD*: 90-91), stands in sharp contrast to the sound of Big Ben, which "blent with that of other clocks, mixed in a thin ethereal way with the clouds and wisps of smoke and died up there among the seagulls" (*MD*: 103), announcing the arrival of Bradshaw's 'Conversion' into the Smiths' house. Having moved on from seeing Rezia as "a lily, drowned, under water" (*MD*: 97) to perceiving her as "a flowering tree" (*MD*: 162), Septimus fears their fertile, dialogic relation will come to an end with the entry of Bradshaw, the "great destroyer of crops" (*MD*: 163), and his insistence on their separation. Hearing the voice of his good friend Evans in his head through "messages from the dead" (*MD*: 162), and feeling that he has lost the battle against "human nature" (*MD*: 107) in the form of Bradshaw and Holmes' "inquisitive eyes", Septimus perceives his only option, in order to preserve his solemnity, his sensitivity and his dialogic relation to Rezia against the condemnation of human nature, to be "the rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out. It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him)" (*MD*: 163-164).

Living on in Clarissa's thinking of him and his suicide, thus becoming 'part of her', Septimus seems to have transcended the separation of human character from which 'conversion' and power struggles issue. Has he solved "the supreme mystery", which Clarissa believes neither Kilman's religion nor Peter's passion has solved, that "here was one room; there another" (*MD*: 140)? As we have seen, Clarissa's ever-ongoing project of solving this

mystery of human character, of people's need for privacy as well as communication with others, appears fertile in some respects and not so fruitful in other ways. Her idea that the "privacy of the soul" and the specificity of the human individual need to be acknowledged, as well as her thought that nothing should be judged as one thing simply, promote the openness and dialogue which she seems to achieve in her relation with the woman in the house opposite hers. At the same time, her thought that people must be allowed to flourish appears to have certain restrictions in the case of her own daughter, whom she tends to view possessively and somewhat patronisingly, thinking her to be naïve and childish; "a perfect baby". Considered as metaphorical of Clarissa's party-planning, Sally's arranging of flowers, decapitating them and making them "swim on the top of water in bowls" (*MD*: 36) may seem like a forced way of creating effortless movement and harmony among individuals, depriving them of the stem, the primary axis from which the buds and flowers have developed.

Mrs Dalloway can be read as an extensive negotiation of what it means to be a human individual and what it needs to flourish as one among many, as "buds on the tree of life". On the one hand, in many ways it emphasises the importance of having 'a room of one's own', exemplified by Clarissa's bedroom, the old woman across the street, and Septimus' resistance to Bradshaw's conversion. In the case of Septimus, however, the issue of having one's own room is presented from a different angle; while Bradshaw insists that Septimus "rest in solitude", he orders that he does so "without friends, without books, without messages" (*MD*: 108), *within* Bradshaw's own psychological regime. Asking Septimus and Rezia to "[t]rust everything to [him]" (*MD*: 108), Bradshaw demands that they separate, promoting the isolation of Septimus and his 'feeling' of having lost the ability to feel. Bradshaw thus appears to express a different notion of privacy than Clarissa, who thinks that the 'ego-conscious' concepts of love and religion would destroy "the privacy of the soul" (*MD*: 139),

and who interprets Septimus' death as a preservation of this privacy and "an attempt to communicate" (*MD*: 202) *outside* Bradshaw's judgmental regime.

Nevertheless, Guth has argued that Clarissa presents no real dialogic understanding of Septimus, reading her as "reducing Septimus to a symbolic leap of defiance" (Guth 39), defining him according to her own need of a self-deceptive ritual to justify her passivity and "incapacity to choose" (Guth: 41). In Bakhtinian terms, this would translate as Clarissa's failure to turn Septimus into "an answerable author" (*AA*: 32). Guth considers Clarissa's contemplation of herself in relation to Septimus as falsifying in a manner that Bakhtin would deem "absolutely alien to the ethical event of being", introducing in the so-called other "not something productive and enriching, but a hollow, fictitious product [...] a soul without a place of its own [...] a participant without a name and without a role – something absolutely extrahistorical" (*AA*: 32). I would argue that these words might be more applicable to Clarissa's relation to her daughter, who seems reduced to a role and pressed into a scheme in which she does not fit. Clarissa's ethical and aesthetical 'regime' or composition varies in its treatment of the different components, negotiating concepts such as privacy, isolation and communication differently. The view that dialogue can only be achieved by acknowledgement of people's privacy, but transcendence of their separation and isolation, seems to be the hopeful message in Clarissa's vision for her party. It has not developed, however, to acknowledge the privacy and individuality of Elizabeth, who must wait, one might imagine, for the multi-named narrating 'I' of *A Room of One's Own* to channel a previously unheard voice; the voice of the female creative subject who expands her operative territory to go beyond the traditional confines of the woman writer so that she may express herself on the literary as well as the social level.

The essayist poses the possibility of a feminine sentence as the voicing of something previously repressed and unexpressed, of someone who had no representation until Mary

Carmichael lit “a torch in that vast chamber where nobody [had] yet been” (*AROO*: 84).

Daring to let her idea unfold and mature “among the reflections and the weeds” (*AROO*: 7) of the stream of thought, Mary Carmichael explores an area that “is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping” (*AROO*: 84), thus appearing one step ahead of Elizabeth as she walks down the Strand five years earlier, “shyly, like some one penetrating on tiptoe, exploring a strange house by night with a candle” (*MD*: 150). Having “gone further and broken the sequence – the expected order” (*AROO*: 91), Mary Carmichael could, perhaps, have inspired Elizabeth to keep on going down the Strand even after dark and not feel she had to go back for her mother’s dinner.

Clarissa muses how she “had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more”, whereas Septimus “had flung it away” (*MD*: 202); can Elizabeth find a way of exploring the serpentine caves without flinging herself away, without having to disconnect from the world completely, so that she might “catch those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of the moths on the ceiling, when women are alone” (*AROO*: 84)? Mental expansion seems to require a bold step away from the public path, onto the private turf and away from the ‘harmonious’ garden confining one to a certain position based on class and sex; for “we have too much likeness as it is, and if an explorer should come back and bring word of other sexes looking through the branches of other trees at other skies, nothing would be of greater service to humanity” (*AROO*: 87). Mary Carmichael seems to have peered through “the branches of other trees” and expanded her mental territory, for she “had a sensibility that was very wide, eager and free [...] It feasted like a plant newly stood in the air on every sight and sound that came its way” (*AROO*: 92). Within the boundaries of her present position on the social level, Elizabeth cannot seem to grow and express herself naturally. About her wish to become

“either a farmer or a doctor” she feels “it was much better to say nothing about it” (*MD*: 150); and though she is “really awfully bored” (*MD*: 148) by the attention she gets from men, she does not demonstrate this boredom the way the essayist expresses her frustration with male literary egocentricity, reading Mr A’s novel and feeling she “must finish the sentence somehow [:] But – I am bored!” (*AROO*: 99).

Elizabeth has barely initiated her sentence, feeling it to be as “small” and “insignificant” as the essayist’s ‘fish of thought’ looks at the start of *A Room of One’s Own*. The essay may be read as marking the stage in the life of Elizabeth where she has the choice to walk out of the shadow of the “giant beech tree” and find her own piece of fertile soil where people will not wonder “[w]hether that was indeed a tree or a woman walking” (*AROO*: 98). This coming out of the shadows, out of the woodwork, as it were, does not mean complete disconnection from one’s origins, one’s roots. Like “books continue each other” (*AROO*: 79), people are connected through the generations, like buds on the same bough, like trees in a forest. These connections make daughters think back through their mothers, make every woman writer “the descendant of all those other women whose circumstances [the essayist has] been glancing at” (*AROO*: 80). By thinking back through her mother, by engaging in a dialogue with her origins and acknowledging her status as “an inheritor as well as an originator” (*AROO*: 107), Elizabeth may arrive at a ‘language’, a sentence by which she can position herself as she begins to step outside the shadows and gain a fresh perspective on the “giant beech tree”, on her mother, and on the social structures that have placed her in the poplar tree role. By moving out of the woodwork, but staying within the social, ‘sane’ level of the garden, Elizabeth can maintain her privacy but express herself intelligibly and communicate, representing her new position and expand her sensibility “like a plant newly stood in the air”.

While it would be farfetched to speculate that Elizabeth will become a writer like Mary Beton/Seton/Carmichael, it seems fruitful to read *A Room of One's Own* as a step further from both *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* as regards Woolf's perception of creativity, especially in relation to women. Whereas gender norms and class conventions appear determining for Clarissa's choice of a 'secretly aestheticising' lifestyle, cultural traditions do not stop the slightly younger Lily Briscoe from painting, despite misogynist comments that women "can't paint, can't write" (*TTL*: 54). And while Sally Seton's "vitality – she would paint, she would write" (*MD*: 199) – seems curbed since her youth, the will and ability to express this vitality creatively is taken up by her sister in name, Mary Seton, a few decades later. The practical accomplishments alongside the development of a new ethical and aesthetical sensitivity and sensibility through Woolf's novels and essay seem to open up new prospects for Elizabeth considering her freedom to express her kind of selfhood.

The dialogic perspective on human interaction is treated in various ways in the texts, but appears to be a common ethical as well as aesthetical fundament in the sense that the most productive relations seem to exist between characters who take a step outside the common path in terms of sexual and social conventions and open up for the difference of others. In *Mrs Dalloway* we have seen this in the "completely disinterested" companionship between Sally and Clarissa, in the mystical bond between Clarissa and Septimus and in the wordless communication between Clarissa and the woman in the house opposite hers. These relations are experienced mostly from Clarissa's perspective, but seem to exemplify Bakhtin's idea that "a second participant is implicated in the event of self-contemplation, a fictitious other, a nonauthoritative and unfounded author" (*AA*: 33); Clarissa's coming to terms with her selfhood and her social position is structured as an open exchange with an other.

Elizabeth, standing on the verge of womanhood, may have yet to 'shape' her "nonauthoritative and unfounded author". Struggling with her relation to Mrs. Ramsay, Lily

Briscoe has been read as finding such a nonauthoritative second participant in Mr. Carmichael; perhaps Mary Carmichael/Seton/Beton can provide a model for Elizabeth's self-contemplation? The model of the androgynous mind, that "transmits emotion without impediment; that [...] is naturally creative, incandescent, and undivided [and that] does not think separately of sex" (*AROO*: 97), may inspire Elizabeth to "devise some entirely new combination of her resources, so highly developed for other purposes, so as to absorb the new into the old without disturbing the infinitely intricate and elaborate balance of the whole" (*AROO*: 84). The question of balance is a main concern for Lily in her process of painting Mrs. Ramsay's picture, on which the next chapter will elaborate.

Chapter Three

“Subject and Object and the Nature of Reality”:

Lily Briscoe’s Relational Aesthetic

“The artist’s struggle to achieve a determinate and stable image of the hero is to a considerable extent a struggle with himself (AA: 6), Mikhail Bakhtin states in his essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”. Throughout *To the Lighthouse*, the painter Lily Briscoe struggles with her picture, constantly feeling that she “must move the tree to the middle; that matters – nothing else” (TTL: 94). Trying to express on the canvas her impression of Mrs. Ramsay, the matriarch, Lily is filled with confusion and doubt regarding her position as an artist and as a woman. Among the guests at the Ramsay summer house in the Hebrides around 1911, Lily feels that “staying with the Ramsays, was to be made to feel violently two opposite things at the same time; that’s what you feel, was one; that’s what I feel was the other, and then they fought together in her mind” (TTL: 111).

Lily’s process of painting is made painful by the various kinds of opposition she is met with not only by the Ramsays themselves, but also by the other guests, most notably Charles Tansley, who repeatedly criticises women, claiming that they “can’t paint, can’t write” (TTL: 54). Her connection and communication with the botanist William Bankes and the poet Augustus Carmichael are also significant in Lily’s coming to an aesthetic, as well as an ethical solution to her problem of portraying her hostess and defining her own role as a woman and an artist. Lily’s relationship to Mr. Carmichael has been held out as especially interesting and important in terms of artistic outlook and creative processes, leading critics such as J. Hillis Miller and Lisa Rado to focus upon Mr. Carmichael as a key character in Lily’s advance towards her artistic vision. They disagree, however, on Mr. Carmichael’s role

as an androgynous figure inspiring Lily's vision and her ability to position herself as an observer outside the hegemonic heteronormativity represented by the Ramsays. Whatever or whomever proves to be more important in her aesthetic vision, it seems apparent that several people and perspectives are influential in Lily's effort to portray Mrs. Ramsay in her picture. This chapter will examine the movement and obstacles of Lily's creative process, how she compromises to reach a satisfactory position among the others, what enables her to express her mental image on the canvas and 'moves her to move the tree to the middle'. The following pages will seek to understand Lily's struggle with herself by investigating how she relates to other characters in *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *A Room of One's Own*, following the methodology and the Bakhtinian approach of the previous chapter and treating these relations as indicative of a dialogical understanding of creativity. Whereas none of the characters in *Mrs Dalloway* are actually artists with an outspoken, specifically aesthetic agenda, Lily Briscoe is presented as a protagonist, a painter whose artistic vision is a central concern throughout the whole novel, suggesting that it be read as a meta-narrative. It seems natural to read her aesthetic effort into the context of androgyny as it is conveyed in *A Room of One's Own*, and to see how Lily's painterly project anticipates the essay's ideal of androgynous writing. The next pages will explore whether Lily could be said to embody the androgynous mind and how her aesthetic activity relates to the "rhythmical order" (*AROO*: 95) of the androgynous vision as it is presented in *A Room of One's Own*.

Before I introduce the readings by Miller and Rado, I find it pertinent to explain my utilisation of them in this chapter. In order to explore the possibilities of a Bakhtinian perspective here, I present their diverging views as two established perspectives against which my own reading must position itself. Thereby I can show how my understanding displaces Miller and Rado's, giving space to a different, hopefully productive approach. My usage of their critical responses is thus somewhat argumentative and pedagogical, and does not aim to

fully account for the complexity of their conceptions. With this as a premise I hope to demonstrate how a Bakhtinian view opens up for another perspective and new possibilities as regards Woolf's concept of creativity in *To the Lighthouse*.

Miller positions Lily's *rhythm* of creativity as one among three others; those of Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Carmichael. He reads Woolf's novel as a "question of whether there is beneath the manifold human activities of doing, thinking, talking, writing, creating, a rhythmical groundswell which is comforting and sustaining"; which might be associated with the vagrant's fertile song in *Mrs Dalloway*, "soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages" (*MD*: 89) and sung in "the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth" (*MD*: 88) which seems to connect people's minds; "or whether such rhythm as there is outside human constructing beats out no more than the measure of approaching death" (Miller 1990: 152). The latter may be linked to the sound of Big Ben as a signifier of Mr. Bradshaw's clockwork rationality of "Proportion" and "Conversion" which seems not only unproductive but destructive to human relations.

The characters' different ways of investigating this question of creative rhythm, their efforts of "rhythmic extrapolation out into the future" (Miller 1990: 155), vary in terms of aims and success. Mrs. Ramsay dies suddenly after several years of nurturing and party-giving; Mr. Ramsay's orderly reasoning mind can never get him past Q. During Lily's last strokes on her painting, Miller claims, she seems overtaken by some rhythmic mental choreography, whether this movement is founded on some "principle outside itself, or whether its power is merely intrinsic, the imposition of a pulsating formal pattern on a formless background" (Miller 1990: 154).

The most successful creative mode in *To the Lighthouse* Miller finds in Mr. Carmichael's "covert, muted, obscure" (Miller 1990: 154) poetry writing. The fact that Mr.

Carmichael is “never or scarcely ever presented from the inside by way of that indirect discourse, the consciousness of the narrator married to the consciousness of the character and speaking for it” (Miller 1990: 154-155), makes Miller suspect a special relationship, an aesthetic alliance between Mr. Carmichael and the narrator. Mr. Carmichael’s poetry is described as slow, sonorous and impersonal, in Miller’s view establishing a link with “the narrator’s impersonal voice [which] transforms everything into pastness and sees everything from the perspective of death” (Miller 1990: 160). Rather than depending on the different characters for its existence, the narrator’s voice is heard also in the mid section, in which there are no human minds to penetrate and describe the world through. The narrator’s perspective thus seems to point to Mr. Ramsay’s attempt to “[t]hink of a kitchen table [...] when you’re not there” (*TTL*: 28); whoever or whatever is narrating, he, she or it does not need the presence of humans to tell the story of the decaying summer house. The narrative mind, however, “an inhuman witness of the universal dissolution” (Miller 1990: 162), speaks in a voice and a language personifying the inanimate surroundings to such a degree that Miller suggests “that the narrator of *To the Lighthouse* is not a ubiquitous mind but language itself” (Miller 1990: 163), animating objects so that “[w]herever there is language there will be personality somewhere”. The inherently personifying quality of language makes Mr. Ramsay’s ‘kitchen table project’ impossible, as “there is no thinking without language” (Miller 1990: 164), without some ‘I’, some ‘you’, some ‘he’, ‘she’ or ‘it’.

Miller goes on to ask which of these personal pronouns would suit the narrator of *To the Lighthouse*, referring to Woolf’s raising of the questions of androgyny and sexual language in *A Room of One’s Own*. The artistic status she has given Augustus Carmichael in the novel and Mary Carmichael in the essay leads Miller to ask if they are not aesthetically related as father and daughter. If *To the Lighthouse* in any way anticipates *A Room of One’s Own*, it is in the sense of rhythm and how this varies along the lines of sex and gender, and

Woolf's main point, in Miller's view, "is that the rhythm of male style does not fit [the woman writer's] natural stylistic stride and pace" (Miller 1990: 165). Miller reads Woolf's concept of creativity as distinguishing between two rhythmic modes: a male, solar, constative conception of rhythm claiming to reaffirm "a pattern already present outside the writing" (Miller 1990: 167), as opposed to a female, lunar and "extrapolative, performative" rhythm; not "measured by its truth of correspondence to any pre-existing pattern", this is writing "beyond or outside the egotistic illusions of 'phallogocentrism', that erect male letter 'I' shadowing and killing everything" (Miller 1990: 168). The female style of writing, knowing "there is no truth, no rhythm but the drumbeat of death" and thus, with its hesitant rhythm being "in resonance with the truth that there is no truth", is the truly constative mode in relation to the male style, "unwittingly performative" (Miller 1990: 168) through its false claim to be affirmative of 'the truth'. Miller then reads the concept of an androgynous style as an ideal mode of writing which combines the performative and the constative modes in an expression of a "fundamental undecidability [...] of what would constitute valid rhythms of style" (Miller 1990: 168). This is also, Miller claims, what the narration of *To the Lighthouse* does, expressing a mind that "is fertilized by the presence of a man in it" (Miller 1990: 169), granting Mr. Carmichael and Lily Briscoe creative power in a "constantly reversing rhythm, affirming itself and at the same time interrupting itself" (Miller 1990: 169).

Lisa Rado understands Woolfian androgyny differently, reading it as a less dynamic concept and even a dead end in both personal and creative concerns, as on the one hand it affirms the subject and "promises the possibility of virtually unlimited empowerment and inspiration, on the other hand, the model of an androgyne imagination at the same time threatens to annihilate the self from which it has been generated" (Rado 20). Rado's main problem with Miller's reading of Woolf, however, is his assumption of masculinity and femininity as "abstractly benign" components, as well as his ignorance of "the desperate

cultural motivation behind the desire for and the image of the androgyne” (Rado 156). For Rado, it is Lily’s confrontation with Mrs. Ramsay’s “paternalistic maternalism” (Rado 155), as well as her identification with and incorporation of the phallus into her creative process, that enables her to finish her painting and define her position as a woman artist. Having incorporated the threat of phallic presence she gains “the transportive empowerment of the sublime”; however, she also represses and loses consciousness of “her body, her femaleness, her sexual identity” (Rado 155).

Like Miller, Rado thinks Mr. Carmichael an important part of Lily’s advance towards her vision; he is calm, content and impersonal, “seemingly unaffected by the often stifling demands of patriarchal society” (Rado 157), and he offers to Lily “the possibility of inhabiting a different subject position and of thereby attaining a protective and empowering creative perspective” (Rado 158). A product of a culturally specific moment in which the third sex was hailed as transgressing sexual and artistic limits, and thus offering Woolf “a possible solution to her painful crisis of authority” (Rado 157), Mr. Carmichael inspires Lily to embrace her role as an observer and outsider of patriarchal heteronormativity and transform her confrontation with it into a work of art. Coming forward as a divine muse for Lily, Mr. Carmichael dissolves the “male poet-female muse dyad and the patriarchal politics on which it is based” (Rado 159). Rado argues, however, that Woolf remains unsure of the validity of the androgyne as a saviour and preserver of artistic authority and authorship. She detects Woolf’s ambivalence in the narrator’s apparently ironic description of Mr. Carmichael’s divine attributes; “looking like an old pagan god, shaggy, with weeds in his hair and the trident (it was only a French novel) in his hand” (*TTL*: 225). This shows Woolf’s uncertainty towards “the transcendent quality of Lily’s vision”, Rado claims, suggesting that Lily merely replaces one kind of tyranny with another, escaping from “her sexuality and her female body” (Rado 160) and repressing her identity.

Miller and Rado represent radically different understandings of Woolf and her concept of androgyny, with strong implications for their readings of *To the Lighthouse* as an anticipation of *A Room of One's Own*. Whereas Miller stresses language and rhythm as essential parts of ideal androgynous writing, Rado puts emphasis on the specifically cultural aspect of androgyny and the androgyne figure as a way out of the increasing crisis of authorship at a particular moment in literary history. Miller understands the androgynous style of writing as an acknowledgement of the unconscious performativity inherent in language, while Rado explains the androgyne imagination as a conscious choice and, in fact, a desperate wish to gain a substantive subjectivity and authority of authorship in a fractured world. What their readings have in common, however, is the extraordinary role they ascribe to Mr. Carmichael as a catalyst in Lily's final stage of painting Mrs. Ramsay. Taking his powerful impact on Lily as a premise for their discussion, Miller sees Mr. Carmichael's position as a fertilising male, constative influence inside Lily's mind, whereas Rado reads his role as an alternative to Mrs. Ramsay's "phallic presence" (Rado 154).

I think they both raise interesting issues for the debate on Woolfian androgyny; Miller's idea of Mr. Carmichael's resembling the narrating voice as a reflection of language and the construction of the novel is thought-provoking, and Rado introduces contextualisation to the largely feminist debate on androgyny. However, I find both Miller and Rado to undermine their arguments by ultimately conceiving of androgyny as a dyadic unity in which Mr. Carmichael's role is elevated to the position as Lily's sole other, or author. Despite his unconventional behaviour and uncertain sexual nature, he contains some male stylistic element that protrudes into Lily's female consciousness, as far as Miller and Rado are concerned. Representing a poststructuralist perspective, Miller holds the androgynous style of writing, combining constative and performative modes of creating, as open to everyone and not bound to a specific sex or gender. Yet, he insists that "there are two possible concepts of

rhythm” in writing; a male and a female, unequivocally tied to the *duality* of constative and performative respectively. While criticising the constative mode for claiming to “reaffirm, to echo, a pattern already outside the writing” (Miller 1990: 167), Miller seems to do this in his own reading. The performative mode, described as “a way of doing things with words that is not to be measured by its truth of correspondence to any pre-existing pattern” (Miller 1990: 168), fits in well with the deconstructionist view of language as a relative and arbitrary structure of meaning that ‘performs’ itself over and over again. He refers to Derrida, the ‘father’ of deconstruction, and his wish to “write like (a) woman” (Miller 1990: 165) to validate his idea that writing performatively is “to write beyond or outside the egotistic illusions of ‘phallogocentrism’” (Miller 1990: 168), and holds this as superior to the constative, male way of writing. The distinction he makes between constative and performative seems correspondent to the Kristevan symbolic and the semiotic orders as complementary dimensions and modes of communication. Favouring the semiotic/performative/female mode, Miller further underscores his tendency to seek affirmation in a deconstructionist “pattern already outside the writing” (Miller 1990: 167). He may thus be said to fall victim to his own aesthetical critique. The problem is not so much the specific associative lines he draws between mode and gender, as his definition of the androgynous style as a combination of two naturally distinct qualities. This hierarchical dichotomy in which the female mode is idealised seems limiting to Woolf’s understanding of androgyny.

Some of the same can be said for Rado’s reading, although she criticises Miller for conceiving of androgyny as a “union of abstractly benign masculine and feminine components” (Rado 156). Still, even though she sees Mr. Carmichael as representing a third sex alternative, Rado too understands the dynamics of Lily’s vision as a dyadic process in which the male presence is elevated to something sublime with whom Lily can identify, thus

repressing her *female* identity. Thus, strangely enough, considering Miller and Rado's deconstructionist and historicist perspectives respectively, they both end up expressing ultimately binary understandings of Woolfian androgyny and a schematic conception of Lily's relation to Mr. Carmichael.

These views appear to me too rigidly tied to the sexual dichotomy which is the etymological basis of the notion of androgyny (*OED*). Woolfian androgyny presented in a Bakhtinian light may open up its potential beyond the gender binary which seems so often to be the foundation as well as the final outcome of other theoretical approaches to the concept. The point of departure for my reading of Lily's painting process is the idea that Woolf's level of ambition transcends the dyadic unity of masculine and feminine elements that some critics believe her concept to represent. With reference to Bakhtin, the androgynous vision seems irreducible to a model of sexual duality and its potential reaching further as regards the concept of creativity as well as the dynamics of Lily's aesthetical process and eventual vision.

Starting out from a wish to paint Mrs. Ramsay sitting with her son James in the window, Lily does seek unity with her object of portraiture. Perceiving Mrs. Ramsay in her wicker arm chair as a triangular, "dome-shaped hive", Lily imagines herself as a bee haunting the hive, "drawn by some sweetness or sharpness in the air intangible to touch or taste" (*TTL*: 58). Lily feels she must define this puzzling "sweetness or sharpness" and gain complete knowledge of Mrs. Ramsay's interior in order to portray her truthfully as a part of her painting. She wonders: "What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored?" (*TTL*: 57). Lily's choice of words here seems to touch upon a central issue of Bakhtin's architectonics, that is the foundational perceptual distinction between subject and object and the conditions this sets for people's knowledge of each other as well as themselves. The wish to achieve a whole out of disparate

parts Bakhtin understands as deeply human and both a consequence of and a premise for the dialogical relation between the self and the other, which he treats as the aesthetic activity taking place between an author and his or her “hero”. Dialogue acknowledges the generality of subjectivity, the interchangeability and simultaneity of the subject/object relation; we all occupy a unique subjective position, but as subjects we are also made objects from the perspective of others. The “art” of knowing an other begins with the self’s projecting itself into the other and experiencing his/her life from within him/her (AA: 25). The aim of this projection, however, is not for the subject and the object to become “inextricably the same”; rather than an “absolute consciousness, a consciousness that has nothing transgredient to itself” (AA: 20); the self and the other engage in a whole in which neither is determinate nor reducible to a single position. The self/other construct entails a dynamic capacity which is based on the simultaneous plurality of the parts rather than their solitary singularity. ‘I’ and ‘you’ are not solitary, but solidary, and are mutually inclusive rather than mutually exclusive.

In the light of these ideas Lily’s wish to unite with her object or ‘hero’ by pressing into Mrs. Ramsay’s “secret chambers” seems both misleading and impossible. Her idea of unity presents itself as more complicated, however, as Lily asks if “loving, as people called it, [could] make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge” (TTL: 57). While expressing an apparently self-contradictory chain of thought here, Lily’s perception of “knowledge” may be associated with Bakhtin’s idea of *cognition*, his term for reflection on experience. In the realm of cognition, the difference between the experiencing self and the experiencing of the other is transcended or ignored, “just as [cognition] ignores the uniqueness of the cognizing *subiectum*. In the unitary world of cognition, I cannot find a place for myself as a unique *I-for-myself* in distinction to all other human beings [...] as others for me” (AA: 37). It follows that the unitary

world of cognition is a sphere which rejects, or suspends the unitary or unique self. Lily, however, seems too focussed upon her own subject position and Mrs. Ramsay's object status as "adored", as the feminine ideal she is commonly perceived as.

The way Lily initially seeks knowledge of her object, wishing to enter its interior in hope of finding some truth of "the thing itself before it has been made anything" (*TTL*: 209), seems to echo the dyadic view of unity that Miller and Rado read into Woolfian androgyny. It also recalls Mr. Ramsay's impossible task of imagining a kitchen table "when you're not there". This attitude to "[s]ubject and object and the nature of reality" (*TTL*: 28) suggests a closing off of self and other into separately fixed positions, of which the privilege of "knowledge", of authorial authority is confined to the self or subject position. This aspect is pointed out by Rado, emphasising the self's repression and forceful incorporation of an other in order to gain creative empowerment. However, Lily does not lock herself to a misconceived subjectivity, and unlike Mr. Ramsay she does not turn inwards in an attempt to strengthen and distinguish the ego as an opposition to the other. Moreover, Lily's process requires her to re-evaluate her perception of Mr. Ramsay in particular, whom she initially sees as "tyrannical" and on whom she must keep "looking down, purposely, for only so could she keep steady, staying with the Ramsays" (*TTL*: 52-53). Considering Mr. Ramsay unbearably narrow-minded, Lily is confronted with her own narrow view as Mr. Ramsay bows down to tie her shoe-laces properly. This scene, expressing at first to Lily a pathetic need for praise and personal prestige, spurs on a more dynamic perspective in her as she senses in Mr. Ramsay a sudden "interest in ordinary human things" (*TTL*: 170), a shedding of

worries and ambitions, and the hope of sympathy and the desire for praise, [as if he] had entered some other region, was drawn on, as if by curiosity, in dumb colloquy, whether with himself or another, at the head of that little procession out of one's range (*TTL*: 170).

Lily cannot help projecting herself into his mind, as it were, sensing his doubts about the reality of the kitchen table and his consequential need for sympathy from others, above all his wife, who has passed away during the war. This episode, in which Lily is physically looking down on the man she has been so intent on categorising as a pitiable tyrant, unsettles Lily's social 'map' in which people have their specific positions. The insight she gains into Mr. Ramsay's needs and the dynamics of "sympathy" leaves Lily feeling "curiously divided, as if one part of her were drawn out there", as Mr. Ramsay and his children depart to go to the lighthouse. Also curious is the fact that Lily seems to be presented from Mrs. Ramsay's perspective as she stands looking towards the lighthouse, "screwing up her little Chinese eyes in her small puckered face" (*TTL*: 171). With Lily's feeling of division between the lighthouse and the lawn, what she perceives of the latter's "hedge with its green cave of blues and browns" (*TTL*: 171) appears associative with Mrs. Ramsay's perception of the blue water before her, "the hoary Lighthouse, distant, austere, in the midst; and on the right [...] the green sand dunes with the wild flowing grasses on them, which always seemed to be running away into some moon country, uninhabited of men" (*TTL*: 17). Mr. Ramsay's tying Lily's shoes seems to be a first step in her "untying the knot in imagination" preventing her from "making the first mark" (*TTL*: 171). Lily's return to her canvas and planning of her picture connects to Bakhtin's idea that

[a]esthetic activity proper actually begins at the point when we *return* into ourselves, when we *return* to our own place outside the suffering person, and start to form and consummate the material we derived from projecting ourselves into the other and experiencing him from within himself (*AA*: 26).

Lily's aesthetic activity proceeds along with the social dynamics taking place especially after Mr. Ramsay takes his leave bound for the lighthouse. Thinking that "so much depends upon distance: whether people are near us or far from us" (*TTL*: 207), Lily acknowledges the positionality of the subject/object relation. Rather than locking herself in a solipsistic artist subject role, she realises the "human being's absolute need for the other, for

the other's seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity" (AA: 35-36). Moreover, her 'interior dialogue' with people around her suggests that not only "a second participant is implicated in the event of self-contemplation" (AA: 33), but also a third, a fourth, and so on. Lily's aesthetical process seems to show that the subject/object relation is more complex than a dyadic unity; rather than a scheme for the distribution of qualities or roles in what Bakhtin denotes an aesthetic event (AA: 20), the connection between author and hero or self and other functions as a premise for a much more heterogeneous and open way of interacting and creating. Lily's understanding of her subjectivity develops to becoming more flexible and dynamic as she lets other voices "penetrate within" (AROO: 101) her mind, thereby arriving at a polyphonic perception of "subject and object and the nature of reality".

Significant to this arrival seems Lily's change of perspective; from focussing on the window, trying to revivify Mrs. Ramsay whose triangular shape no longer throws a shadow on the steps, Lily turns her eyes upon the lighthouse, which Mrs. Ramsay did ten years before, and the Ramsays' boat sailing towards it. As the boat reaches the middle of the bay, "everybody seemed to come very close together and to feel each other's presence, which they had almost forgotten" (TTL: 199). These words may recall Clarissa Dalloway's feeling that "on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part [...] of the trees at home [...] part of people she had never met" (MD: 8-9), implying co-dependency and co-authoring as essential qualities of human existence. Lily also seems to follow Clarissa's idea that to know "any one, one must seek out the people who completed them" (MD: 167), as she projects herself into the experience of the people surrounding Mrs. Ramsay, feeling that "[f]ifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get around that one woman with", and that "[a]mong them, must be one that was stone blind to her beauty" (TTL: 214).

This she finds in Mr. Carmichael, whose wanting “very little of other people” (*TTL*: 211) rather upsets Mrs. Ramsay. Through his ‘blind eye’ to Mrs. Ramsay’s beauty, Lily seems to be able to enter the “dome-shaped hive” that she has longed to unite with; she “felt as if a door had opened, and one went in and stood gazing silently about in a high cathedral-like place” (*TTL*: 186). In a moment which “seemed extraordinarily fertile”, questions flash up in Lily’s dialogue with Mrs. Ramsay: “Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, This is knowledge? Aren’t things spoilt then, Mrs. Ramsay may have asked [...] by saying them?” (*TTL*: 187). While Lily has walked through an open door rather than “pressed through into those secret chambers” of Mrs. Ramsay, the insight she gains comes in the form of more questions of the intimacy and knowledge she has longed for. As Lily steps “back to get her canvas – so – into perspective” (*TTL*: 187), she returns to her own ‘room’ and starts to form and consummate the material she derived from projecting herself into her object (*AA*: 26) . Seeking to answer Mrs. Ramsay’s questions, Lily ponders her own “disinterested” relationship with William Bankes, whom she “loved” (*TTL*: 192) and with whom she has shared “something profoundly intimate” (*TTL*: 60). Their connection seems to confirm Mrs. Ramsay’s suggestion that things are “spoilt [...] by saying them”, as between Lily and William, “[m]any things were left unsaid” (*TTL*: 192). This may recall Clarissa’s understanding of Richard’s love for her without his speaking (*MD*: 129), and also the scene in which Mrs. Ramsay appears to communicate her love for her husband without words; “[Mrs. Ramsay] had not said it, but [Mr. Ramsay] knew it” (*TTL*: 134).

Nevertheless, when Lily tries to see Mrs. Ramsay “through William’s eyes” (*TTL*: 192), she cannot seem to get past Mrs. Ramsay’s “cover of beauty” (*TTL*: 193). Turning to Mr. Carmichael, whose eyes seem “to reflect the branches moving or the clouds passing, but to give no inkling of any inner thoughts or emotion whatsoever, if he wanted anything” (*TTL*: 14), Lily is struck with the physical absence of Mrs. Ramsay and her shadow on the steps. She

ponders how her memory of Mrs. Ramsay has presented her as a “[g]host, air, nothingness, a thing you could play with easily and safely at any time”. Her idea that “the whole wave and whisper of the garden became like curves and arabesques flourishing round a centre of complete emptiness” (*TTL*: 194) appears as a reminder of the meaning of distance and absence for human relations and interaction. Musing on the “unreality” felt in the early morning or after “coming back from a journey [...] before habits had spun themselves across the surface” and without “the usual chatter”, Lily ponders how one “glided, one shook one’s sails (there was a good deal of movement in the bay, boats were starting off) between things, beyond things. Empty it was not, but full to the brim”. Lily feels she is moving and floating in some substance into which

had spilled so many lives. The Ramsays’; the children’s; and all sorts of waifs and strays of things besides. A washerwoman with her basket; a rook; a red-hot poker; the purples and grey-greens of flowers: some common feeling which held the whole together (*TTL*: 208).

Lily’s thoughts here seem to echo Clarissa’s sensing odd affinities “with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind the counter – even trees”. Clarissa’s idea that “since our apparitions [...] are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death”, also seems relevant and related to Lily’s pondering on Mrs. Ramsay’s role after she is gone.

Lily’s feeling of gliding “between things, beyond things” expresses the idea that ‘meaning’ is produced in the spaces *between* people rather than *within* people. Thus, when Lily projects herself into Mrs. Ramsay’s mind, what she finds echoes rather than answers the questions she started out with. It is on the “journey” back to her own point of view that Lily needs to become aware of the “unseen” space between them and fill “this silence, this emptiness” (*TTL*: 208) there with a ‘voice’ and a meaning, though not necessarily through

words. This points to the empty canvas on which Lily struggles to express some “relations of masses” (*TTL*: 59), implying a relational aesthetic which may be said to resemble Bakhtin’s dialogical principle. Watching the Ramsays’ boat sailing towards the lighthouse, Lily cannot seem to “achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture; which was necessary” (*TTL*: 209). The seemingly dualistic opposition really represents the heterogeneity of the aesthetic event; as the boat draws nearer to the lighthouse and further away from Lily’s empty canvas the meanings of distance, perspective and the limits of perception and subjectivity present themselves in a complex web of dialogue. As Lily’s divided mind, partly projected into Mr. Ramsay’s, stretches out to encompass the perspective from the lighthouse at which the boat is about to arrive, their ‘opposite’ perspectives on the lighthouse are joined, reflecting the way Mrs. Ramsay and Mr. Carmichael’s perceptions of a fruit bowl build up its image at the same time as they co-author each other; “looking together united them” (*TTL*: 106).

In the same way, the lighthouse is consummated by a range of different and changing perspectives throughout the novel. Mrs. Ramsay, for example, sees it as “hoary [...] distant, austere”, echoing Lily’s image of the kitchen table seen through Mr. Ramsay’s eyes as “visionary, austere” (*TTL*: 170). The objective truth of the kitchen table, however, is not just “intangible” like Mrs. Ramsay’s mysterious “sweetness” which Lily tries to define through her picture; it simply does not exist. Nothing is a “thing in itself”, and thus the lighthouse is also semiotically multitudinous and simultaneous. James, approaching the lighthouse by boat and confused by his seemingly contradictory perceptions of it as both “silvery, misty-looking tower” (*TTL*: 202) and a “stark tower on a bare rock” (*TTL*: 220), wonders which is the right one: “So that was the Lighthouse, was it? No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing” (*TTL*: 202). These thoughts attribute an enormous potential to the bay as a mediating space, of the sea as an “unfathomably deep” infinity of possible perspectives.

When Lily's consciousness seems to stretch across the bay with Mr. Ramsay all the way to the lighthouse, she experiences herself as "encompassing any boundaries, any body – by extending [her]self beyond any bounds" (AA: 40). Lily's subject position requires her to adjust her point of view with the movement of Mr. Ramsay, whose

outward, delimited existence takes on the character of an axiologically resilient and heavy, inwardly weighty, material for shaping and sculpting the given human being – not as a physically delimited space, but as an aesthetically closed and delimited space – as a *living* space that has the character of an aesthetic *event* (AA: 42).

The aesthetic event of Lily's painting treats the sea, the fleeting dimension of human relations as a living space in which the subject is exposed to all its possibilities, but also all its doubts and insecurities. This relation to the sea is also found in Clarissa's sense of "being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day" (MD: 9). Lily appears to echo her thoughts as she contemplates the "odd road" of painting: "Out and out one went, further and further, until at last one seemed to be on a narrow plank, perfectly alone, over the sea" (TTL: 187). To prepare for painting and aesthetic activity is to expose the mind to a sea of "innumerable risks" which "must be run; the mark made" (TTL: 172) through a hazardous process:

Always (it was in her nature, or in her sex, she did not know which) before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness when she seemed like an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt (TTL: 173).

Lily raises the question herself of whether her creative urges and obstacles are grounded in her being female or not. After she makes the first mark with "a curious physical sensation" (TTL: 172), her painting process is described in bodily imagery that has often been read as overtly sexual. Lily's experience of a looming mass protruding, "pressing on her eyeballs" and starting "the lubrication of her faculties" (TTL: 173) has led critics such as Rado to see Lily's mind as "a phallus, her creativity as an ejaculative, lubricating fountain" (Rado 155).

Miller reads Lily's painting as an expression of a female mind fertilised by the, albeit alternative, male presence of Mr. Carmichael. Both critics read Lily's course of creation as exemplifying the sexual dyad they understand Woolfian androgyny as in *A Room of One's Own*: "Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished" (*TTL*: 103). The road seems short from this statement to the deduction of artistic androgyny as a mental state balancing specifically masculine and feminine qualities. The essayist claims, however, that the "fully developed", creative mind "does not think separately of sex" (*AROO*: 97), and that "it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (*AROO*: 102). While Lily does seem to think of "sex" as a separate personal factor, she is far from certain that it determines one's creative abilities. During her "concentration of painting", Lily forgets her sex, losing "consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance, and whether Mr. Carmichael was there or not" (*TTL*: 174). Her lack of sexual self-consciousness seems to correspond to Mary Carmichael's writing "as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself" (*AROO*: 92).

In the light of the essay's apparent focus on the sexual aspect of creativity, describing the artistic mind as a collaboration of masculine and feminine, it may be tempting to understand Lily's 'lubricated faculties' as significant of a "curious sexual quality" based on gender opposites. Thinking of the body as primarily sexed and reading the bodily imagery of Lily's process as sexual, however, may reduce her vision to a struggle to gain a *gendered* body for her naked soul. Reading Woolf's aesthetic androgyny and Lily's artistic vision in a Bakhtinian light, seeing the collaboration within the mind between male and female as metaphorical of the perceptually based self/other relation, greatly expands the validity and

productive potential of the Woolfian concept of creativity. Within this frame of thought, the soul's birth takes place on a different level than the sexual. From hesitating naked, "alone, over the sea", the "unborn soul" must dive into the open ocean of possible perspectives, in order to be bodied and able to position itself according to other bodied souls. To dive into this sea is to dispense with one's need for a fixed subjective perspective and to acknowledge the interchangeable relation that the self has to the other. The self's recognition of this relation is a realisation of the other's otherness and the self's reciprocal position. This positionality requires the self and the other to be realised, to be bodied on a relational level that goes beyond the sexual.

In order to position herself as a creative subject, Lily must treat Mrs. Ramsay dialogically as an other instead of playing with her monologically as a "[g]host, air, nothingness", as what Bakhtin calls "a soul without a place of its own [...] a participant without a name and without a role – something absolutely extrahistorical" (AA: 32). For Lily's "soul reft of body" to become a whole, a self, she must dare to lose the safe distance at which she has kept her 'heroine', and the "screen of the other's living reaction must be bodied and given a founded, essential, authoritative independence and self-sufficiency: it must be made into an answerable author" (AA: 32). The 'authorisation' of Mrs. Ramsay's otherness is also the 'materialisation' of her memory by which Lily grants her communicative power in a dialogical, "living space". Acknowledging Bakhtin's idea that "aesthetic memory is *productive*" (AA: 36), she feels that the articulation of Mrs. Ramsay's absence requires her 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" (TTL: 218). This is the level at which Lily can project herself into Mr. Ramsay and meet him in dialogue; recovering an "interest in ordinary human things", Mr. Ramsay is able to stretch his "range" the way Lily does hers and enter their "colloquy" (TTL: 170). Lily's perception of the connection and simultaneity of the

ordinary and the miraculous also recalls James's perception of the complexity of the lighthouse as both mystic and misty and "stark and straight" (*TTL*: 202).

Dialogue allows memories to become "part of ordinary experience" (*TTL*: 219). Granting others communicative co-authorship affects not only one's view of oneself, but also of other people. Thinking of Charles Tansley's comments that "women can't paint, can't write" (*TTL*: 174), Lily remembers their playing ducks and drakes on the beach, watched by Mrs. Ramsay, whose presence seems to present Mr. Tansley in such a novel light to Lily that she has to "re-fashion her memory of him, and it stayed in the mind almost like a work of art". Lily's newfound look on people through dialogue with others makes her feel content that "the great revelation" (*TTL*: 175) of the meaning of life might never come: "Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark" (*TTL*: 176). One is reminded of Clarissa's imagining "an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed" (*MD*: 35) in a momentous revelation breaking up the flow of everyday life. Lily's thought of the suddenly, unexpectedly lit match also contrasts with Charlotte Brontë's unproductive writing as presented by the essayist in *A Room of One's Own*: "She is like a person striking a match that will not light" (*AROO*: 80).

Productive writing and painting seems based on the dialogical self/other relation as a premise for a polyphonic perspective making up and turning the empty space of the canvas into a "living space". Lily's realisation of dialogue as a "necessary principle" spurs on the process in which 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" (*TTL*: 174). The necessity of this is indicated by her following a "rhythm which was dictated to her" (*TTL*: 173) in a dancing movement. Having dared to bare her mind "wide open" Lily communicates her "experience with perfect fullness" (*AROO*: 103) in a selfless, unconscious manner which echoes Bakhtin's idea that the artist sees her "own creating only in

the object to which [s]he is giving form, that is, [s]he sees only the emerging product of creation and not the inner, psychologically determinate, process of creation” (AA: 6). Thus, “the process of creation is altogether *in* the product created, and the artist has nothing left to do but to refer us to the work [s]he has produced” (AA: 7).

This is what Lily does, referring to her painting after she has finished it with a line in the middle; “I have had my vision” (*TTL*: 226). Her last stroke marks her successful subject position by which she is able to create. For the completion of her picture she has solved the opposition of “what you feel” and “what I feel” by realising the interchangeability of the self/other relation with its inherent dialogical necessity and polyphonic potential. Lily’s work of art is a recognition of “how ‘you’ and ‘I’ and ‘she’ pass and vanish; nothing stays; all changes; but not words, not paint”. She thinks, “not of that actual picture, perhaps, but of what it attempted, that it ‘remained for ever’” (*TTL*: 195). Her validation of her work measures not the painted canvas itself, but the degree to which her “concentration of painting” is true to her vision, feeling that she has succeeded in building “up out of the fleeting and the personal the lasting edifice which remains unthrown” (*AROO*: 92). This is not to say that Lily has positioned herself aesthetically once and for all; the “relations of masses” are always moving and changing, meaning dissolves and people pass away, requiring the artist to recreate these relations according to the “eternal passing and flowing” (*TTL*: 176) of reality. A “determinate and stable image of the hero” is achievable only through recognition of the hero’s dialogical and positional relation to the artist herself, meaning that Lily’s “vision must be perpetually remade” (*TTL*: 197).

Conclusion

The last chapter of *A Room of One's Own* opens by discussing how the notion of sexual distinctions may disrupt some mental unity necessary for the act of creation, before the speaker goes on to ask, “[w]hat does one mean by ‘the unity of the mind’?” (*AROO*: 95). While the essayist refers to the androgynous unity of the individual mind here, the previous discussion has shown the need for the self to go into dialogue and projecting itself into an other before returning to its own position. Thus, the essayist’s question may be seen as a return to the question haunting Lily of how to achieve “unity” with Mrs. Ramsay. Lily’s wish to unite with her is a wish to know her inside out, to come as “close as she could get” and thereby be able to paint her. She wonders if “loving, as people called it, [could] make her and Mrs. Ramsay one?” (*TTL*: 57). The discussion in the previous chapter explains the “loving” and “intimacy” that Lily seeks with her object of painting to be of a non-sexual, anti-binary nature. The ‘closest she can get’ in the end, the knowledge she gains is of a kind that preserves what Clarissa thinks of as “a dignity in people; a solitude; [...] and that one must respect” (*MD*: 131). Clarissa further believes that “love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul” (*MD*: 139). Reflecting upon “the supreme mystery” of the perceptual difference and division between people, Clarissa muses how “here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that, or love?” (*MD*: 140). The solution of this mystery seems to require communication between people’s own rooms before the individual’s “chambers of the mind” (*TTL*: 57) can be connected into a creative, androgynous unity.

While Lily and Clarissa express divergent comprehensions of “love”, both views may be seen in relation to Bakhtin’s understanding of the term. Bakhtin sees love neither as a means for a subject and an object to becoming “inextricably the same”, nor as a self-serving concept destroying people’s privacy; on the contrary, his idea of love is “inextricably” tied to

and a natural extension of the fundamental dialogical self/other relation. The basic perceptual division between self and other cannot be transcended, only mediated; “I cannot love myself as I love the other”, and so the “emotional-volitional relationship to the other *as other* – the relationship which we call ‘love’ and which we are quite incapable of experiencing in relation to *ourselves*” depends upon the parts’ following the necessary principle of relativity and dialogue. Egocentricity contradicts love, as the “egoist acts *as if* he loved himself, but in reality he experiences nothing that resembles love or tenderness for himself; the point is precisely that he does not know these feelings at all”. Egotistical self-preservation is an essentially anti-aesthetic and unproductive act, “utterly devoid of any loving and cherishing elements, any aesthetic elements whatsoever” (AA: 48). ‘Love’ in Bakhtin’s terms would then imply not the pressing through, but an opening of doors between the secret “chambers of the mind and heart” (TTL: 57).

This corresponds well with the speaker’s argument in *A Room of One’s Own*; her typical contemporary, “self-conscious” poet blocks “the fountain of creative energy” (AROO: 99) by locking himself up in “the male side” of his brain so that “his feelings no longer communicated; his mind seemed separated into different chambers; not a sound carried from one to the other” (AROO: 100). This dissonant “self-assertive virility” (AROO: 101) contrasts sharply with the vagrant’s “voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end [...] of no age or sex” (MD: 88), reaching and confronting Rezia and Peter with some deeply hidden aspects of their emotions with her song of “love which has lasted a million years”. This ‘love song’, “soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages” (MD: 89) and “issuing in a tuft of blue smoke among the topmost leaves” (MD: 91), expresses an everlasting, all-encompassing quality that recalls Septimus’ idea that people must “not cut down trees” and that “[u]niversal love” is “the meaning of the world” (MD: 162). Possibly sounding clichéd in

other contexts, ‘universal love’ here seems to be what connects each person’s “unseen part” (*MD*: 167), above or below ‘ground’, to another’s.

As has been established in the previous two chapters, this “unseen” dimension of interweaved relations is often perceived as something “unsaid” (*TTL*: 192) in Woolf’s character connections, something communicated without words and adding a sense of unreality. Clarissa contemplates that each time she gives a party “she had the feeling of being something not herself, and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another” (*MD*: 187). The “unsaid” or “unreal” level of human existence refers to the open, empty spaces between people where dialogue lies latent in the positioning of the self and the other, filling the emptiness between them with meaning. This openness between people is a premise for the empathy which Bakhtin sees as an essentially aesthetic, creative activity.

Lily sees a striking potential in the distance between people, in “this silence, this emptiness, and the unreality of the early morning hour [...] before habits had spun themselves across the surface”, feeling “something emerge. Life was most vivid then” (*TTL*: 208). This vividness signifies the relational level at which the “ordinary” (*TTL*: 218) meets the miraculous, where the dialogue between the self and the other is realised on what Bakhtin calls “a new plane of being” (*AA*: 36). Part of Lily’s puzzlement about the Ramsays’ relation is its ability to stir up a fight between “I” and “you” in her mind, yet they seem integrated in “the unreal but penetrating and exciting universe which is the world seen through the eyes of love”. Even William’s “gazing at Mrs. Ramsay” inspires her to think of a love “distilled and filtered; love that never attempted to clutch its object; but [...] was meant to be spread over the world and become part of the human gain” (*TTL*: 53). This disinterested love reflecting the dialogue between self and other acknowledges the “gulf [...] that one must respect” as a necessary part of all human relations, indeed, as the open, living, polyphonically potent space in which relations are created.

The polyphonic, productive potential of the dialogical self/other relation and by consequence of love is also expressed in Lily's belief that love "had a thousand shapes" (*TTL*: 208). The multifaceted nature of human experience that Lily implies, touches upon the heterogeneity of meaning and multiplicity of reality that are central aspects of Woolf's androgynous vision of creativity as it is expressed through the character connections discussed in this thesis. The Bakhtinian perspective from which we have read Woolf's texts has exposed the potential of androgyny to go beyond the mostly feminist critique that this thesis negotiates. Moving away from Showalter's feminism of difference, Moi's deconstructionist approach to androgyny as *différance* and Rado's critique of what she considers a desperate wish for a solid, sublime subjectivity, this reading has showed how the scope of Woolf's concept of creativity is enlarged in the light of Bakhtin's theory of dialogue.

The previous chapters have attempted to show how the androgynous mind relates to the need for a room of one's own and the necessity of dialogue respectively, within and between characters. Setting up a dialogue between the ethical and aesthetic efforts of Elizabeth Dalloway, Lily Briscoe and Mary Carmichael in particular, it has been the aim of the thesis to open a few doors between the "different chambers" of the texts, as it were, and let sounds carry from one to the other, without imposing homogeneous unity upon the works as a whole. The exciting element and dialogical potential of Woolf's texts lie precisely in their heterogeneity with respect to perspective and layers of meaning. Indeed, the essayist maintains in a statement that some may read as a resignation regarding the need for one's own room in order to create, that "in a question like this truth is only to be had by laying together many varieties of error" (*AROO*: 104).

Rather than resigning, rather than saying that each perspective is 'wrong in its own right' and rather than asserting that one point of view is inherently correct, this statement is founded upon a definition of truth as consisting of several viewpoints which relate themselves

to each other, creating a visionary, aesthetic whole that “must be perpetually remade” (*TTL*: 197). Thus, a thesis paper like the present, like any other critical approach, cannot claim to be ‘right’ or to be exhaustive in any respect; any standpoint is just another for other perspectives to orientate themselves against. One can attribute to such a debate “a sense of repetition – of one thing falling where another had fallen, and so setting up an echo which chimed in the air and made it full of vibrations” (*TTL*: 215). Paradoxical as it may seem, this repetition brings something new to the table and develops the debate, and it appears to me that the discussion of Woolf’s works as a sustained enquiry into the concept of creativity is still vibrant and alive.

Woolf’s concept of creative androgyny and Bakhtin’s dialogical aesthetic express impatience with what the essayist calls “this pitting of sex against sex, of quality against quality; all this claiming of superiority and imputing of inferiority, belong to the private-school stage of human existence where there are ‘sides’” (*AROO*: 104). The hierarchy and categorisation of qualities work against the androgynous state of mind by which “our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women” (*AROO*: 112). Echoing her question “[w]hat does one mean by ‘the unity of the mind’?” (*AROO*: 95), the speaker ponders the nature of reality itself:

What is meant by ‘reality’? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable – now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech – and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. This is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates (*AROO*: 108).

This definition of “reality” seems full of references to scenes and episodes in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* which have been discussed in the previous chapters as momentous revelations of dialogical insight and as steps towards a realised vision of creativity. The speaker reminds us here of the sense of people coming together on a relational,

'enlightened' level at Mrs. Ramsay and Mrs. Dalloway's dinner parties. The passage also recalls Clarissa and Sally's kissing under the stars and Peter's brutal interruption as a clash between "the silent world" and "the world of speech". The latter brings associations of Clarissa's "unseen" bond to Septimus and the lady living across the street, and it certainly connects to Lily and Mr. Carmichael's sharing thoughts, though barely speaking, on the lawn outside the summerhouse. The essayist seems to have Clarissa in mind as she "stood for a moment, looking at the omnibuses in Piccadilly. She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that" (*MD*: 8). While it has been questioned whether Clarissa lives up to this statement or ideal in her relation to her daughter, Elizabeth herself, riding the bus around London, experiences the "consolatory" effect of the "uproar" (*MD*: 151), "this procession [which] would wrap them all about and carry them on". She almost escapes Clarissa's myopic view of her before realising her "mother would not like her to be wandering off alone like this" (*MD*: 152). Lily, on her part, rids herself of her narrow view of Mr. Ramsay by getting him and his children at such far a distance that it is difficult for her "to discern what their nature is". Only so can she gather them and Mrs. Ramsay in some rearrangement of their relations at the dialogical level that her final stroke on her canvas represents. These are all episodes which have a profound, "permanent" effect on the characters' minds and their relations to each other, marking the dynamics and principles of dialogue which it is the writer's task to find and collect and "communicate [...] to the rest of us" (*AROO*: 108).

This task seems fulfilled in Woolf's "erratic" collection of moments of reality into a dialogic whole signifying a heterogeneous and polyphonic "unity of the mind". The overwhelming amount of criticism of her works in itself says something about the "suggestive power" (*AROO*: 101) they have in readers' minds to "give birth to all kinds of other ideas". The dialogical and creative potential of Woolf's works presents itself fully when the texts are

brought together in a communicative whole which is eternally processional and whose androgynous vision “must be perpetually remade”. These are characteristics qualifying *A Room of One’s Own*, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* as the “sort of writing of which one can say that it has the secret of perpetual life” (*AROO*: 100).

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