

Elements of Fiction in Virginia Woolf's Nonfiction

Dissolving the Boundaries
in *A Room of One's Own*

by Siren Elise Frøytlog Hole



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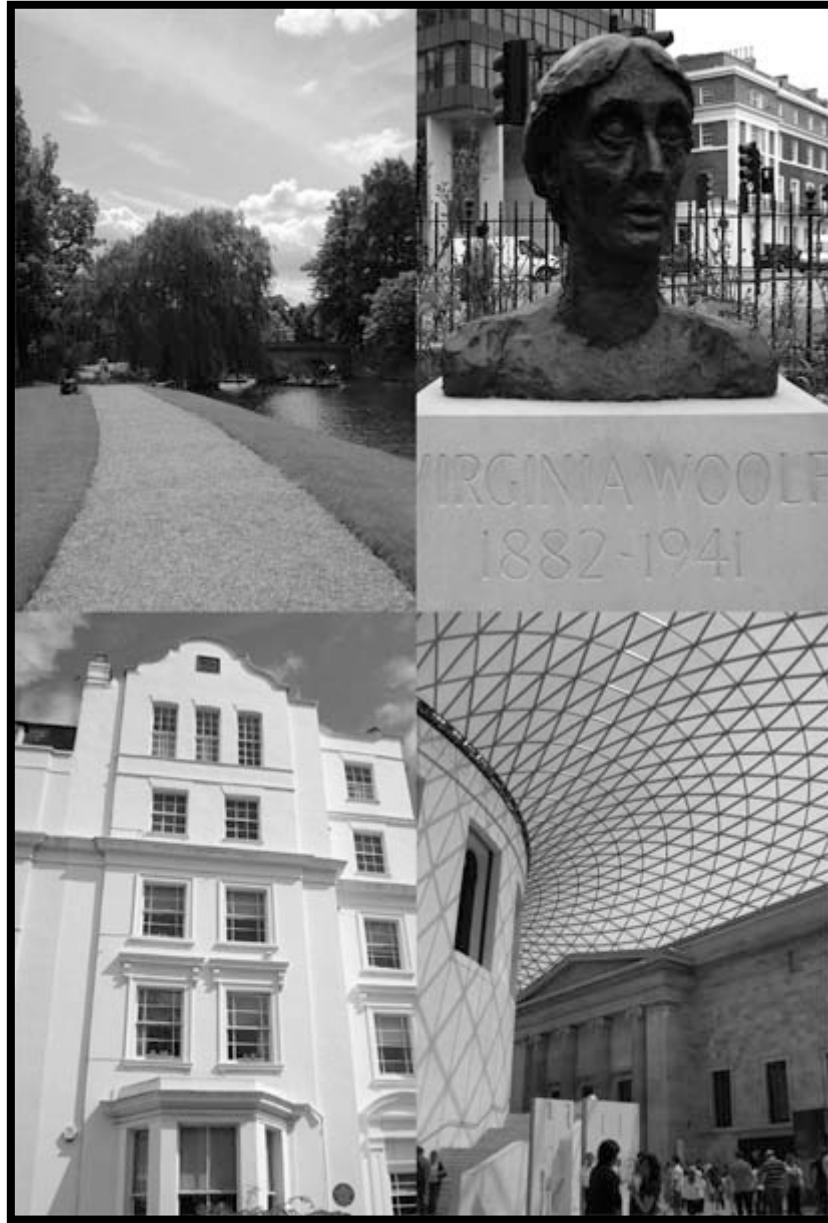
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“Where the past, present, and the future of Virginia Woolf and A Room of One’s Own intersect with representations in my contemporary reality”

Abstract

While Virginia Woolf's use of unconventional narrative strategies in her novels is well-established, such strategies have, to a large extent, been overlooked with regards to her essays. When it comes to *A Room of One's Own*, the narrative dimension has often been de-emphasised because of the important political and feminist message brought forth by Woolf's narrator. This thesis argues that the chosen form, style, content, and argument of Woolf's essay are inextricably linked. Coupling narratology with essay theory, the present thesis discusses the major narrative devices applied in *A Room*: the employment of a narrative structure, a fictional narrator, and the choice to partly rely on fiction. By asking why these strategies are crucial for the way in which the message is brought forth, the analysis shows how Woolf deconstructs the boundaries of fiction and nonfiction, connecting the strategic and argumentative facets of the text.

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I finish my thesis in the loving memory of Målfrid S. Frøytlog (01.08.1955-10.01.2012), my mother, whose passing was so sudden and unexpected. I am forever thankful for your unconditional love and your sometimes ridiculous belief and pride in me. Now, when you are gone, your invisible deeds and subtle actions are vivid and perceptible. I love you.

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Abbreviations

Where required and necessary, parenthetical citations use the abbreviations below and refer to the following works and editions:

- AROO* *A Room of One's Own* (1929. London: Penguin, 2000)
- D* *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 5 vols. (Ed. Anne Oliver Bell. London: Penguin, 1977-1985)
- E* *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols. (Ed. Andrew McNeillie. London: Harvest Books, 1986-2011)
- L* *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 6 vols. (Eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann. London: Hogarth Press, 1975-1980)
- QB* Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, 2 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1972)

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1 ‘Both and’ not ‘Either or’ - Introduction and Theory

1.1 Aesthetics *and* Politics, Narrative *and* Argument, Style *and* Meaning

In Vita Sackville-West’s 1929 review of *A Room of One’s Own*, both the ambiguity of the discourse Virginia Woolf employs in her ‘feminist manifesto’ and her multiplicity as a writer are brought to the fore: “Mrs Woolf, as you probably know, is a critic as well as a novelist; but this little book, which is not a novel, is not pure criticism either. In so far it is ‘about’ anything at all, it is a study of women, their circumstances (especially in the past), and the effect of those circumstances upon their writing” (257). Thus, already in Woolf’s lifetime this influential text was recognised as a fusion of discourses as well as a piece of feminist writing. Sackville-West both calls attention to the form of the text and its content. Her comment gives prominence to the difficulty of defining ‘this little book’. Similarly, Laura Marcus emphasises that a strict line cannot “be drawn between her overtly feminist, ‘polemical’ works and her fiction. Her novels take up the images and imaginings of her pamphlets; her ‘non-fiction’ uses strategies more often associated with fictional narrative” (2000 217).

Such strategies are the main enquiry of this thesis. In *A Room*, Woolf employs narrative strategies and violates the generic standards of the discourses she invokes. I ask what function such strategies have; not only in terms of formalities, but also with regards to the effects on the reader, on the aesthetics, and on the presentation of the politics in the text. Woolf reinvents, twists, and challenges common and conventional conceptions of textual notions. As Graham Good rightly observes, “[Woolf] is a ‘both/and’ thinker” in preference of thinking in the categories of either/or (150). Or, as articulated in *To the Lighthouse*: “[f]or nothing was simply one thing” (251). In this thesis I use this observation as point of departure for my analysis of ways in which Virginia Woolf dissolves the boundaries of fiction and nonfiction in *A Room*.

Thus, the phrase ‘elements of fiction’ in my title refers to the narrative strategies in Woolf’s essay which are more commonly associated with fictional narratives. These strategies can be subsumed under the choice of a narrative form, the application of a first-person narrator, and the decision to partly rely on fiction for the purpose of writing an essay. In this sense, the title denotes both formal elements of fiction and actual fictional elements. This is all the more interesting and complicated by the fact that the text is an essay classified as nonfiction. In Woolf’s text there is an ongoing negotiation between these categories. Accordingly, the treatment of narrative features must also be regarded in connection with the text’s generic classification. Here, I align my analysis with Leila Brosnan’s warning against

the tendency to “dissociate style and content from genre and context” (3). Because of the tension between fiction and nonfiction, I will approach the text using perspectives from both narrative theory and essay theory. My analysis makes use of these theoretical lenses to approach *A Room* as narrative, the narrator of the essay, and the borderline between fiction and reality. My project is not biographical but because of the importance of self and the writing subject in *A Room*, Woolf’s biography will be considered when fruitful. “She is one of the most self-reflecting, self-absorbed novelists who ever lived. Yet she is also one of the most anxious to remove personality from fiction” (Lee 17). With this in mind, there may always be a question as to how she writes herself into the discourse.

This analysis will explore how Woolf dissolves, subverts and transgresses boundaries usually associated with textuality and discourse. Simply put, my thesis seeks to approach the ambiguity of Woolf’s discourse in terms of a narrative reading, without limiting the analysis to a simple detection and identification of formal elements and narrative strategies. To reiterate, I want to engage in what *function* such elements serve, and emphasise how Woolf’s use of narrative techniques can be directly connected with her argument. As William R. Handley claims, “her narrative experiments are in their effects and functions discernibly political” (3). In other words, my analysis explores how the mediation of Woolf’s ‘message’, so to speak, occurs on more than one level: formal, structural, and textual aspects affect communicational and contextual matters. The reading of both the text and the argument is thus seen as inextricably linked to its narrative strategies.

This approach also involves arguing that the ‘message’ goes far beyond that of ‘a room of one’s own’ and relates more profoundly to her breaking with conventions and violation of ‘the traditional’. Because the notion of ‘the traditional’ often entails a masculine view, Woolf’s transgressions must be seen as part of her feminist project. In *A Room*, she challenges the traditional notion of Truth, history, reality, and unity, as well as (in part) writing an alternative female literary history and opening a verbal space for female subjectivity. These topics figure as important ones in my thesis. I argue that there is no simple manner in which to disentangle the composition of *A Room* from its argument. As Woolf’s narrator indicates, it is quite difficult to “decide what is style and what is meaning” (9).

Accordingly, my argument resonates with and refers back to the foundational discussion between Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi. In this debate Showalter criticises the application of narrative strategies in *A Room* and argues that the message becomes another if one manages to remain distanced from such strategies: “[i]f one can see *A Room of One’s Own* as a document in the literary history of female aestheticism, and remain detached from

its narrative strategies, the concepts of androgyny and the private room are neither as liberating nor as obvious as they first appear” (285). Moi, on the other hand, holds that the narrative strategies are crucial for the reading of the essay: “[m]y own view is that remaining detached from the narrative strategies of *Room* is equivalent to not reading it at all, and that Showalter’s impatience with the essay is motivated much more by its formal and stylistic features than by the ideas she extrapolates as its content” (3). Thus, whereas Showalter considers the rhetorical devices as signs of Woolf’s evasiveness, Moi links them directly to the politics of the text. Her claim that the aesthetics and politics of the text cannot be separated has led several critics to connect form and content in research on Woolf’s essays. As Moi puts it, to fully grasp her ideological as well as aesthetic project, we need to locate “the politics of Woolf’s writing *precisely in her textual practice*” (16). In other words, *A Room* can readily be treated as an aesthetic argument. Seen thus, Moi provides the important groundwork needed for my discussion. Rather than simply agreeing with Moi, however, I want to show *how* and *why* overlooking Woolf’s narrative and textual strategies is an impartial and reductive reading of the text.

After the publication of *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Moi’s position has come to be the more acknowledged view of Woolf’s aesthetics and must be said to have paved the way for other works on Woolf’s essays. Moi’s contribution fuelled a new interest in the relationship between form and content as well as argument and politics at work in Woolf’s essays. By addressing narrative and rhetorical strategies, scholars such as Melba Cuddy-Keane, Judith Allen, Leila Brosnan, Anna Snaith, Jane Goldman, Elena Gualtieri, and Laura Marcus have raised our awareness of the essay as dialogue, the importance of the reader, and the instability of language and meaning. Furthermore, their research has reconceptualised and borne out important connections between formal or structural features and Woolf’s politics. As such, they bring about a crucial bridging of the gap not only between form and content, but also between text and context, and highlight the way in which textual matters can be entwined with its outside world. With regards to the essay at hand, such approaches also underscore that the argument goes beyond that of ‘a room of one’s own’, aligning the text with Woolf’s other essays and general textual innovation. This suggests a suitable opening for the analysis and argument presented in my thesis.

When I choose to address *A Room* as my sole focus and primary text, it is partly because I have located a tendency to always mention its narrative strategies without actually devoting space to analysing them. I want to find grounds for common statements about this essay in the very text. This is not to suggest that comparative and general approaches to

Woolf's texts are not valuable. Nor is this thesis an attempt to deemphasise connections and transtextuality in her works. Rather, it is an attempt to use the text itself more extensively in order to shed light on the ideas that are presented. Therefore, in order to identify the important connections between structural, aesthetic and formal elements on the one hand, and the political and ideological facets on the other, I will not only depend but even insist on close reading. As a method, close reading allows for the extensive focus on the primary text that one needs when conducting a comprehensive narrative analysis. However, this analysis will not be done in isolation from the previous and ongoing critical debate. Furthermore, the prospect of establishing a connection between aesthetics and politics, narrative and argument, or style and meaning is conditioned by my theoretical framework which is a coupling of essay theory and narrative theory. The remainder of this chapter will provide a foundation on which it is possible to examine "linguistic and structural features and [relate] these to issues of gender, [relocating] critical interest on the internal operations of language and genre" (Brosnan 9).

1.2 Virginia Woolf and *A Room of One's Own*

As a text hovering between traditional forms and genres, *A Room* is tangent to many of the aspects of Virginia Woolf's writing. The essay genre is often likened to letters, the diary and autobiographical writing, as well as critical and journalistic pieces. *A Room* is thus considered an intermediary volatile hybrid which combines striking aspects of Woolf's fictional prose and her essayistic writing. Accordingly, the text at hand makes its way into a myriad of discussions of all the variety of Woolf's text. Because of this, Woolf's personal writings (published in six volumes of her letters and five volumes of her diary) as well as her nonfiction (particularly her essays) are important for a narrative reading of *A Room*. Yet her novels and fiction are always brought to the fore with regards to narrative strategies. This tendency can perhaps best be explained by her affiliation with the Bloomsbury group, and more particularly with her position as a modernist writer. Because her novels employ strategies that challenge concepts such as traditional realism and its structures, questions perception, time, and human experience, they are often seen as the epitome for the new modes of representation. These features are often overlooked in her essays because they manifest themselves differently.

Despite her many publications, however, a great problem arises when trying to pin down a few paragraphs as to who Virginia Woolf was, what life she led and how this affected her literary production. To me, this problem is first and foremost due to Woolf's own

reluctance to be categorised, her view of life writing, and her conception of the self as fluctuating. Furthermore, the problem of finding ‘some pure nuggets of truth’ to present her life is connected with the different reception and treatment of her works over the course of time. This problem has, perhaps, become especially pressing after the publications of her personal writings. Woolf’s life is surrounded by myths and general readers all have different conceptions and ideas about her. Hermione Lee strikingly notes that “[s]he takes on the shape of difficult modernist preoccupied with questions of form, or comedian of manners, or neurotic highbrow aesthete, or inventive fantasist, or pernicious snob, or Marxist feminist, or historian of women’s lives, or victim of abuse, or lesbian heroine, or cultural analyst, depending on who is reading her, and when and in what context” (769).

These numerous aspects of Virginia Woolf illustrate the many paradoxes related to her. She was both an insider and an outsider in more than one sense. Because of her sex, she was excluded from education and professional training, but due to her class, she was given privileges unthinkable to women from the working class. These elements are important both in her life and in her writing, and are often tempting to see as dichotomies. By contrast, however, binary pairs such as private/public and man/woman are seldom resolved into either the one or the other. As Anna Snaith emphasises, “[w]e need to allow her to be two things at once, particularly given her own revulsion at the thought of the fixing of her reputation or identity” (2000 6). As I will come back to in my analysis, this paradoxical relation to opposites and the ability to be ‘both and’ instead of ‘either or’, are not only important for an understanding of her life but also indispensable to her sense of and our understanding of Woolf’s writing.

Many of the feminist concerns visible in Woolf’s works were established already in her childhood. Her exclusion from the world of formal education, Victorian society’s expectations of her, and her father’s control over their family are but some of the factors contributing to the critique of patriarchy presented in both her fiction and nonfiction. Woolf’s two political pamphlets, *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas*, are the two pieces usually dealt with when talking of her feminism. Whereas the former is often considered charming and witty, the latter is a cross and polemical essay against fascism, about pacifism, and women’s resistance to war. Thus, the two have often been treated as opposites. As Laura Marcus suggests, however, “it might be more fruitful to think of the differences between the two texts as differences in rhetorical strategy” (2000 217). Essays such as ‘Memories of a Working Women’s Guild’ and ‘Professions for Women’ are also prominent with regards to Woolf’s conception of feminist claims, challenges, and ideas. In the course of the four last

decades Virginia Woolf's feminism has been thoroughly established, criticised, reinvestigated, and reinvented. In the critique of Woolf's feminism, Elaine Showalter, Adrienne Rich, and Tuzyline Jita Allen are important actors who particularly challenged the concepts of androgyny and impersonality.¹ I am not suggesting that such criticism has not been important, but because of Naomi Black (2004) and Alex Zwerdeling's (1986) excellent works on Woolf's feminism, we are beyond the point where Woolf's political approaches and agendas need 'saving'. Consequently, my analysis will not be preoccupied with answering such criticism or proving, so to speak, that Woolf had feminist thoughts. Rather, my main concern is to explore how she presents them.

In the ongoing discussions Woolf's political and social engagement is a given and her feminism is often considered as the centre of her concerns. Black also relates a claim about the consistency of feminist traits in Woolf's texts in general: "[a]ny writer's texts differ, and texts themselves develop as they are written. But there is likely to be a sort of skeleton or armature of belief underneath them all. Virginia Woolf's writings demonstrate a constant and consistent pattern that is both feminist and recognizably the same over time" (Black 1-2). This view is crucial for the choices made in this thesis. Since *A Room* is one of the cornerstones (often *the* cornerstone) in feminist literary theory, an analysis of this text cannot fail to take feminism into account. The essay's main ideas have had enormous impact on the dynamic approaches and development of feminist literary theory. However, I position my argument in studies of Woolf's feminism which allow for comments about it without making feminist literary theory a part of my framework.

As of 2012, 130 years after Virginia Woolf's birth, she is established as a feminist writer and as an essayist in the literary tradition. As my introduction suggests, however, Woolf has not always been recognised as an essayist. Her reputation as a great writer and modernist author, indeed the canonisation of Woolf, has been on the grounds of her novels and not her essays. At best the essays have been used to shed light on the novels, and not until recent decades have they been considered either by themselves or as a whole. Jane Dubino and Beth Carole Rosenberg connect the renewed interest in Woolf's essays with the recognition of feminist issues within her writing: "[i]t is probably no coincidence that with the

¹ Androgyny and impersonality are very important concepts in Woolf's writing and are often scrutinised in analyses of her texts. However, these notions have a long history and a fairly complex theoretical foundation. Because of this, I refer to them when necessary but my theoretical framework and scope of analysis are elsewhere. In relation to androgyny, particularly, Lisa Rado's *The Modern Androgyne Imagination: a Failed Sublime* and Nancy Topping Bazin's *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision* are important contributions.

feminist impulse in Woolf criticism in the 1970s came a re-evaluation of the essays in general” (7). The possibility of a rediscovery of Woolf’s essays came in part with Michèle Barrett’s publication of *Women and Writing* (1980), which was a collection of Woolf’s feminist essays. With regards to *A Room*, Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) must also be seen as a main contributor. Her analysis accelerated the discussion of this particular essay and encouraged scholars such as Moi to deem it differently. The fact that Moi made it possible for this essay to be considered an experimental modernist text equal to Woolf’s novels must be seen as a very important contribution establishing her essays as autonomic texts. Another important reason for a renewed interest in Woolf’s essays is the six volume publication *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. These aspects, amongst others, have led to the emergence of a new direction of Woolf studies in the 1990s, where Woolf is treated not only as a novelist, but as a critic, journalist, reviewer, literary historian, and essayist. In *A Room*, Woolf occupies all of these positions.

1.3 Essay and Narrative - Structural Oppositions?

1.3.1 Essay Theory: Discourse, Experience, Language, and Self

In *Virginia Woolf’s Common Reader* Katerina Koutsantoni emphasises that considerations of Woolf’s essays call for “research into what exactly constitutes an essay, how Woolf stands in relation to the history of the genre, and how or what are understood as essayistic techniques and tendencies which inflict the subjects under discussion as well as the role of the reading and writing subjects” (7). *A Room of One’s Own* employs an ambiguous discourse and its textual mosaic is striking. Yet some of its instability is applicable to the essay genre in general and its generic plasticity is important for my discussion. In this section I elaborate on general ideas about the essay form before I turn to specific conceptions of structure and language, self and experience, and reader and writer. My theoretical backdrop relies particularly on works of Theodor W. Adorno, Graham Good, Georg Lukács, Claire de Obaldia, and John Snyder. These all have different approaches to the essay and distinctive notions of what the essay genre actually is. Nonetheless, they all connect the etymological origin of ‘essay’ (an attempt) with its hybrid form, and recognise Montaigne as the father of the essay. The essay is a diverse and flexible genre, using a myriad of techniques and taking on different forms. Indeed, de Obaldia claims “the existing consensus to lie in an agreement on the uncircumventable indeterminacy of the genre” (2).

Considered the father of the essay, characteristic features of Montaigne’s *Essays* are prominent in the essay as defined after his time. The presence of dialogue, the emphasis on

experience, and the representation of self are all aspects that are given prominence in past and present essay studies. Fragmentary text elements as well as writing presented as a journey or as the actual *process* of thinking are also qualities inherited from Montaigne's *Essai*. The distinctive manner in which his essays are written is thus an expression of the writing subject and its cognition. His writing is presented as a journey without a destination, as associative thinking rather than text: "Montaigne's essays follow routes of association that trace with microprecision the processes of his thinking and sensibility" (Snyder 166). Carl Klaus makes a similar observation when stating that "his essays were, in a sense, a means of thinking on paper, of trying things out in writing" (4). Despite the awareness of self, self-expression and self-knowledge that characterise Montaigne's writing, he avoids what Woolf perhaps would have called egotism. As Good puts it, "[a]lthough 'man' is differently realized in every individual, the study of one man is nevertheless one way to study 'man'" (9). The particular is used to say something about the general and the subjective experience is made representative for an understanding of the world. But because of Montaigne's extensive use of quotations, the self is never alone, nor is it the sole focus. Richard M. Chadbourne notes that "the self that one finds in his essays is never solipsistic or narcissistic but has been broadened to include many other 'voices'" and that "dialogue occurs not only with his reader and with the authors he quotes but also with himself" (569). Similarly, Good sees quotation as a means "of bringing a new voice into a conversation, rather than of providing authoritative support" (1).

This is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's ideas about the essay genre. More precisely, perhaps, the above paragraph attests to Woolf's take on writing in general. Although it may seem inappropriate to recall the 'father of the essay' when the primary text is *A Room*, "Woolf did to a certain extent imagine the essay as opposed to the novel, along fatherly lines" (Bowlby 225).² Juliet Dusinberre's *Virginia Woolf's Renaissance* also highlights bonds with male essayists (40). Furthermore, in her work on Woolf's political language, Judith Allen discusses the similarities between Montaigne and Woolf. The first chapter, entitled 'Those Soul Mates: Virginia Woolf and Michel Montaigne', elucidates similarities in their approaches to writing. Allen suggests that Woolf's several readings of his *Essays* "enabled her to infuse her own work with commentary about his writing, to compare his methods with those of other writers, and to use ideas, and methods to inspire her own writing" (1). Moreover, Woolf's own engagement with Montaigne is apparent in her own essay in the first volume of *The Common Reader*, entitled precisely "Montaigne".

² Woolf has received some critique for not engaging properly in the essayistic writing of women.

Because of its fragmentary and protean nature, the essay has a tendency to be set in opposition to or outside the notion of genre. Good, for instance, states that “[i]ts initial impulse was away from genre altogether, in the direction of formlessness” (1), yet at the same time he emphasises the essay’s ability to accommodate other literary qualities. De Obaldia positions the essay in a marginal genre and concludes, rightly to my mind, that “the essay as a genre is neglected” (57). She also highlights the essay’s anti-generic traits and its tendency to combine “a seemingly arbitrary mixture of literary characteristics” (3). Its problematic relations to genre are also noted by Snyder who categorises the essay as a ‘nongenre’ because of its ability to adapt to and to transcend generic boundaries: “[i]t is discourse as discourse, discursivity as such, textuality untrammelled by generic boundedness” (150).

Thus, it is not only the single essay and its text that are composed by fragments. Its ability to borrow from other genres can actually be seen as a generic trait. According to de Obaldia, the essay has “the ability to incorporate the qualities of any one of the three Aristotelian categories of the lyric, the dramatic and the epic” (2). Good stresses its similarity with empirical science and philosophy because of its focus on observation and proof, yet concludes that it “exists outside *any* organization of knowledge” (4). The genre also evokes aesthetic beauty and is often thought of as being well-written, concerned with style and form. Because of its representation of self and experience, the essay has strong bonds with autobiographical genres. In it, however, there is also a focus on the receiver. It has “something in it both of the letter to an ideal friend and the dialogue with an ideal friend” (Chadbourne 568), thus it resembles conversation. The focus on the receiver also reveals the persuasive nature of the essay, as it is often entangled in an argument “concerned with convincing us of the version of reality that it presents” (Klaus and Scholes 2). Persuasion and argument connect the essay with rhetoric, which typically combines emotional and logical strategies (Klaus 6). The presence of logic and order emphasises its non-artistic features. As de Obaldia puts it, “the content of the essay [...] assigns the genre primarily to the category of didactic, expository, or critical writing” (5). Good finds similarities with the academic article, but also that the essay differs because it rarely uses footnotes, employs quotations differently and has no requirements for citations (6). Consequently, oppositional traits are not only striking for *A Room* but are closely connected with generic traits. What is significant in *A Room*, however, is the very *function* of combining such traits.

Somewhat simplified, the contradictory features at work in the essay genre can be regarded in terms of the opposition between art and science. As Good emphasises, the essay has affinities with both artistic and scientific writing: “the essay usually goes unrecognized

either as knowledge (because it is seen as too ‘artistic’) or as art (because it is ‘knowledgeable’ rather than ‘creative’)” (15). This troubling distinction also informs Lukács’s and Adorno’s landmark essays on the essay form. In “On the Nature and Form of the Essay,” Lukács argues that the essay is an independent art form “which separates it [...] from all other art forms (2). Yet, although he wants to define it as strictly as possible, Lukács also stresses its similarities with other forms of writing, and finds that the essay form resides between artistic and scientific writing. Furthermore, he connects the essay’s content with the manner in which it expresses it: “it is bound to [the things it speaks of] and must always speak ‘the truth’ about them, must find expression for their essential nature” (9).³

In his essay “The Essay as Form,” which takes Lukács’s essay as its starting point, Adorno agrees with the idea that the essay hovers between art and science. Noting that the essay neither achieves something scientifically nor creates anything artistically (152), Adorno argues that it is only the essence of the essay’s content, and not its form, that is “commensurable with logical criteria” (170). Thus its content can be connected with science whereas its form cannot. Similar to an opposition between art and science is the contrast between subjectivity and objectivity. Whereas science claims to be an objective discipline, the arts are often associated with subjective thought and consequently considered unable to reveal universal truths about the world. Adorno connects the two, however, arguing that the object cannot be independent from the subject because the object is subjectively interpreted: “if it is to reveal itself, requires from the person receiving [it] precisely that spontaneity of subjective fantasy that is chastised in the name of objective discipline” (153). These are issues Woolf raises in her writing. In fact, as I will argue, modes of artistic and scientific discourses are present in *A Room* as well, serving to challenge dominant traditions.

Adorno extends Lukács’s argument that the essay is occupied with things which already have a form. In contrast to science which requires concepts as *tabula rasa* in order to define and claim power over them, the essay acknowledges that “all concepts are already implicitly concretized through the language in which they stand” (160). Adorno here emphasises the way in which both the essay and knowledge are dependent on language for meaning. The essay form does not separate presentation from its material. Rather, it connects form and content. It proceeds methodically unmethodically, presents its matter in its total complexity and does not reduce it to either a logical argument or a storyline (160-161). For Adorno, the essay has neither a beginning nor an end, or in philosophical terms: “[i]ts

³ The notion of an ‘essential nature’ can of course be questioned but Lukács’s comment nevertheless provides a possible connection between the form or style of the essay and what it speaks of.

concepts are neither deduced from any first principle nor do they come full circle and arrive at a final principle” (152). Yet the movement of concepts *do* come together in a ‘configuration’. Adorno perceives of the essay as a whole coming together from fragments in the form required by its material, its *idea*,⁴ This notion is reminiscent of Woolf’s observations in “The Modern Essay,” where she comments that “certain principles appear to control the chaos” (*E* 4 216) and that “the art of writing has for backbone some fierce attachment to an idea” (224).

Form and structure are part of another layer of the distinction between artistic and scientific writing at work in the essay form. As a genre hovering between the two poles, its structuring forces have been seen as distinctive from other genres. It is perceived of neither moving in the direction of logic argument nor in linear way of narrative sequences: “[i]n the essay, concepts do not build a continuum of operations, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet” (Adorno 160). Similarly, de Obaldia finds that “[t]he essay is an essentially ambulatory and fragmentary prose form. Rather than progressing in a linear and planned fashion, the essay develops around a number of topics which offer themselves along the way” (2). Snyder recognises these topics along the way in the form of detours, which the essayist follows “as a side route along a given thoroughfare” (166). These detours are similar to the process of thinking, of the associative, immediate, simultaneous yet fragmentary activities of the human mind. Because it appears in the fashion of spontaneous thought “the essay tends to be presented *as experienced*,” and “the order is ‘as it occurred *to me*,’ not ‘as it usually occurs’” (Good 8). In Adorno’s phrase, “thought gets rid of the traditional idea of truth” (159). Despite a fragmentary and fluctuating nature, however, form and structure are held together and perceived of as a whole. For Adorno, the idea(s) of the essay are the structuring force that decides its form. For Good, the overall structure is linked to the notion of self: “[t]he mixture of elements in the essay – the unsorted wholeness of experience it represents – can only be held together by the concept of self” (8). The ideas and the content of the essay, as well as experience and the notion of self, are decisive for its form. The way in which such elements come into play in *A Room* is one of my main inquiries.

Because of the insistent way in which the essay relies on different elements rather than plot and sequence for its structure, it is easily presented as an opposite to narrative. This is, however, not the whole truth. Both de Obaldia and Klaus recognise that the essay can rely on the notion of story and storytelling. The former sees the feature of storytelling as borrowed

⁴ In this sense, his essay could also have been called “The Essay *is* Form.”

from the epic, noting that the inclination of the essayist is “to narrate or relate rather than to teach” (3). Klaus makes a direct connection between the essay’s author and its narrator: “[i]n the narrative essay, the author becomes the narrator” (22).⁵ He also links what is told directly to the essayist: “he records what *he* sees from *his* angle of vision, from *his* point of view in space and time” (5). As I will show in the next section, this is quite contradictory to the notion of a narrator. Furthermore, Klaus asserts that “the narrative essay differs from the story itself in that it is build around a specific event or situation which has existed in space and time, and it presents itself as a kind of record of that event or situation” (22). In other words, the notion of narrative only in part contradicts Adorno’s and Good’s view of the essay structure: in the narrative essay as well, we see the importance of an idea. Although it relies on a story, this story is nevertheless grounded in self and its experience.⁶

This said, the essay’s structuring forces are constructs, indeed created. The frequent use of words such as expressivity, language, textuality and verbliness when discussing the essay highlights an important aspect of the essayistic discourse: the conceptualising function of language, or better yet, the creating function of language. For example, Snyder holds that the essayistic voice and self are created from language as “the automatic construction of self out of textuality” (161). Lukács’s discussion emphasises the autonomy of the essay’s creating language and structure, suggesting that “two essays can never contradict one another: each creates a different world” (11). Similarly, Snyder’s focus on text allows him to see the essay as self productive but also as world producing. It creates a dimension out of its textuality, where the dimension of discourse is seen as constative action independent of mimesis and history (153). Instead of linking the essay only to the text and isolate it from history and facts, Adorno links the world of the essay to the factual world:

Just as little as a simple fact can be thought without a concept, because to think it always already means to conceptualize it, it is equally impossible to think the purest concept without reference to the factual. Even the creations of phantasy that are supposedly independent of space and time, point toward individual existence – however far they may be removed from it. (158)

These observations touch on the notions of textual and worldly boundaries. Adorno’s view also provides the important connection across such boundaries of language and historic reality, and highlights that language and discourse affect spatial and temporal conceptions.

As communication and discourse theory remind us, however, there is one crucial element or agent that has yet to be mentioned. For language to be invested with meaning, it needs a receiver. The creating function of language is dependent on a reader. Although all the

⁵ For the other theorists it seems to be given that the essayist’s ‘I’ is the same as the author.

⁶ Despite the fact that the narrative essay is a recognised subtype, it is often treated as something peculiar. For instance, John Snyder considers Rousseau’s essays as different because of their narrativity.

theoreticians mention the reader, Snyder connects the reader, the essay, and language in a precise manner: “[the essay] constitutes itself in the process of being read” (162). This is similar to Woolf’s notion of the reader and her or his suggestive power. Their takes on the purpose of reading an essay are remarkably similar. Snyder finds that a reader of an essay “reads as a pure reader: ‘keep reading’” (153). Similarly, Woolf suggests that “[t]he principle which controls it is simply that it should give pleasure; the desire which impels us when we take it from the shelf is simply to receive pleasure” (*E* 4 216). Others look more closely at the relation between sender and receiver, and how the connection between essayist and reader affects the reader’s trust, expectations, and response. Klaus problematises this by explaining how “[the essayists] ask [the readers] to take their words for things” (5). Theresa Werner highlights how this presupposes that the reader trusts the essayist: “the writer sets up a kind of dialogue with the reader, creating an intimate bond of understanding” (656). De Obaldia also comments on this bond and states that the indeterminacy of the essay genre “affects the ‘contract’ between writer and reader” (2). The very word ‘essay’, she claims, affects the expectations of the reader. Because it suggests that something is only tried out, the reader is prevented from accessing it as ‘Truth’. At the same time, however, ‘essay’ is associated with “the authority and authenticity of someone who speaks in her or his own name” (3). This notion becomes significant when addressing an essay where the speaker negates her own identity and proves acutely interesting when coupled with narratology.

1.3.2 Narratology: Narrativity, Storytelling, Narrative levels, and the Reader

Because Virginia Woolf’s text is complex and multifaceted, it is fruitful to approach it from different theoretical perspectives. This section will focus on narrative theory, outlining the important narrative concepts that I rely on in my analysis. I mostly draw on classical narrative theory but I also include some strains from the cognitive branch. To my mind, this is particularly important because the two branches provide different means of thinking about texts, something which helps me access the textual mosaic of *A Room*. Accordingly, my reliance on narratology is not only a simplified utilisation of concepts; it also provides me with diverse methods for approaching stories. Following the emphasis on stories, a fruitful way to begin such an inquiry is in terms of narrativity. Narrativity is a measurement of the extent to which a text appears as a story or narrative. It could easily be called ‘tellability’ or ‘storiness’. The conditions for narrativity, however, change according to which definition one uses to define narrative. I will rely on four different definitions of narrative that help me unravel the stories in the text. I combine these definitions partly because I am reluctant to

approach one of Virginia Woolf's texts with one static definition. The various definitions provide flexibility and underscore different aspects. In *A Room*, rhetorical, spatial, and temporal facets all affect the narrative dimension.

At a first glance, the traditional definition of narrative is enough to approach Woolf's essay as a narrative. It has two parts. First, it defines narrative as a story, which in turn is an event or a sequence of events situated in space and time that constitutes its plot. Second, it makes the representation of the story, the narrative discourse, part of the definition. To explain the difference between story and discourse one must, as Chatman puts it, look at the doubly temporal logic: "[n]arrative entails movement through time not only externally (the duration of the presentation [...]) but also internally (the duration of the sequence of events [...])" (9). In other words, the duration of a narrative consists of both story-time and a text-time. Furthermore, the events in the story happen chronologically while the order in the discourse may be anachronic. In narrative theory, then, the term 'story' cannot be accounted for without talking of 'narrative discourse'. These elements are the foundation for Harold Abbot's articulation of the traditional definition of narrative: "narrative is the representation of events, consisting of *story* and *narrative discourse*; story is an *event* or sequence of events (the *action*); and narrative discourse is those events as represented" (19).

Ryan finds this definition of narrative too limited and is critical of the distinction between narrative discourse and story. Story too, she argues, is a representation "but unlike discourse it is not a representation encoded in material signs" (347). Furthermore, Ryan holds that story is a cognitive construct or a mental image of a possible world with characters and objects in it. This world needs to undergo some kind of transformation which, for instance, can be linked to the goals, plans, or emotions of the characters. Thus, in addition to the formal dimension, the cognitive construct of story has a spatial, temporal, logical and mental dimension. For Ryan, "this definition presents narrative as a type of text able to evoke a certain type of image in the mind of the recipient" (347). Ryan's definition provides a useful framework for a way into my discussion of the spatial dimension in *A Room*.

Fludernik's definition of narrative, or rather her condition for narrativity, is also connected with the cognitive apparatus of the human mind: "[r]eaders actively construct meanings and impose frames on their interpretations of texts just as people have to interpret real-life experience in terms of available schemata" (13). Accordingly, the condition for narrativity cannot be based only on textual elements, but has to contain some emotional involvement and evaluation. Fludernik links the interaction with texts to our interaction with the real world and makes use of our tendency to impose stories on our surroundings. The

focus Fludernik has on experience can be used as a means of thinking about how experience manifests itself in the essay: “[e]xperientiality, as everything else in narrative, reflects a cognitive schema of embodiedness that relates to human existence and human concerns” (13).

James Phelan too focuses on the reader’s interaction with the text, and holds that the reader is influenced both by the content and the form of the narrative. In common with Ryan and Fludernik, Phelan emphasises the “recursive relationship” or “feedback loop among author, text and reader” (5) and uses this kind of recursive relationship as a foundation for his definition of the ‘rhetorical narrative’. He understands narrative as a rhetorical act: “somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened” (3). In addition to time, place and action, he also brings forth a new facet: the purpose and the means of bringing forth the purpose. For Phelan, not only the purpose behind the text serves to categorise a text as narrative, the textual elements applied to convey this purpose do so too.⁷ The fact that Phelan pays particular attention both to the agency of narration and its rhetorical and textual instruments makes his definition valuable for my analysis of the politics of *A Room*.

What these definitions all have in common is the assumption that narratives are based on communication. Whereas the traditional definition presupposes a receiver when including text-time (or reading-time), Ryan’s definition is oriented towards a recipient in terms of the narrative’s effect on her or his imaginative abilities. Fludernik’s notion of experientiality also bases itself on the recipient since it is the receiver’s cognitive schemata that infer experientiality. Phelan pinpoints how this communication involves the reader’s interaction with the text: it includes formal and textual elements as well as the communicative process. Because I focus on dialogue in the essay, the processes of communication are of utmost importance. The communication in a narrative is often outlined in terms of Roman Jakobson’s communication model – with a number of agents involved in an exchange of a ‘message’ – modified to suit narratives. My analysis makes use of some these agents, including the real or historical author, the narrator, the narratee, and the historical reader.⁸

Similarly to the theoreticians on the essay, Ross Chambers holds that this kind of communication is “dependent on an initial contract between the participants in the exchange”

⁷ It should be noted that David Herman’s characterisation of the prototypical narrative equals a combination of these aspects. In his theoretical model, the basic elements of a narrative are “(i) situatedness, (ii) event sequencing, (iii) worldmaking/world disruption, and (iv) what it’s like” (9). These concepts inform the way in which I approach the narrative and argumentative dimensions of *A Room*.

⁸ The nature of my analysis renders the concepts of the implied author and the implied reader somewhat superfluous. By not relying on them in my discussion, however, I am not suggesting that these are not important concepts. Rather, because I also rely on concepts from essay theory, notions from this theoretical branch also inform my analysis of agents in the narrative communication.

(8); “[w]here the narratee offers attention in exchange for information, the narrator sacrifices the information for some form of attention” (51). In this exchange it is the narrative situation or the context that determines the interaction between the narrator, the information or message and the narratee. Accordingly, the focus on the recipient opens the connection between the material text and historical reality. By including the reader in my analysis in this way, I reduce one of the dangers of close reading. The tendency to focus too intensely on textual elements is partly remedied when the situatedness of the reader is taken into account.

Although new definitions of narrative have been coined in order to get rid of the importance of the narrator, I agree with Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan that “there is always a teller in the tale, at least in the sense that any utterance or record of an utterance presupposes someone who has uttered it” (89). To state that someone has uttered the tale, however, is not enough. With regards to fictional narratives, and in stark contrast to the common conception of the essayist, there is always heavy emphasis on the fact that the narrator and the author are not the same entity. At the most, and also in first-person narratives, the narrator is recognised as the author’s instrument. This contrast is important in an analysis of *A Room* where the essayist and the narrator cannot be easily conflated. One can also view the narrator in terms of its participation. Personal pronouns and participation are but two aspects of the narrator. We also need to look at other parameters usually applied in narrative analysis: perspective and voice, degree of reliability and perceptibility, and narrative level.

Arguably, the most important distinction when it comes to narration is the separation of perspective and voice. As articulated by Gérard Genette, there is a difference between “the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*” (1980 186). The point is that the ‘speaking’ and the ‘seeing’ need not be attributed to the same agent. This distinction roughly coincides with the oft used terms ‘perspective’ and ‘voice’. The narrator can speak in her own voice, while adopting the focal point or perspective of a character. Based on the degree of focal restriction, Genette makes a typology of focalisation, where internal focalisation is best explained and illustrated through first-person narratives. Despite the fact that first-person narratives are internally focalised, he stresses that it “should not tempt us to confuse the two instances of the focalizing and the narrating, which remain distinct even in ‘first-person’ narrative, that is, even when the two instances are taken up by the same person” (194). The feature that separates the instances is time and knowledge, rather than narrative personae.⁹

⁹ In retrospective first-person narratives the storyworld is often focalised from the younger first-person’s perspective, whereas the narration is done by the older self recounting the story. In later narrative theory this distinction is referred to as the ‘experiencing-I’ and the ‘narrating-I’.

Because the teller in *A Room* is a first-person narrator, my discussion will draw on implications often associated with this kind of narrator. First-person narratives make use of fixed internal focalisation, and thus, the point of view is limited to that of the narrator. This kind of focal restriction has an effect on the narrative communication and the reader's interpretation of the text. Because the application of 'I' in many ways collapses the distance between the reader and the text, a first-person narrator can be conceived of as both reliable and unreliable. As Jakob Lothe puts it, "[t]he reader has no choice but to see the fictional events with the eyes of this character, and will therefore in principle more easily accept the vision he or she presents" (42-43). The cue here is 'in principle'. This kind of focal restriction also makes the narrator a 'suspect'. Due to the subjectivity associated with the use of 'I', a question presents itself as to what is *not* told by the narrator. The lack of something similar to an objective voice may cause the reader to question what is narrated. The notion of the reliable and the unreliable narrator is grounded in Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*: "[f]or lack of better terms, I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work [...] and *unreliable* when he does not" (158). Furthermore, one usually talks of different degrees of unreliability, and there are often specific indications in the text as to whether the reader should trust the narrator. According to Rimmon-Kenan "[t]he main sources of unreliability are the narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme" (101).

A similar concept is the perceptibility of the narrator. Although not primarily concerned with the reliability of the narrator, perceptibility nevertheless influences the reader's interaction with and interpretation of the text. Chatman distinguishes between covert and overt narrators. The degree of perceptibility is inferred from signs of overtness. There is a range of marks that signify the narrator's presence. For the purposes of my analysis, perceptibility is important in terms of comments on the actual discourse. Such comments can easily undermine the mimetic function of fiction, and include addressing the reader, concerns about the representation of the story, and footnotes. Thus, self-reflexivity and textual self-consciousness become a part of the narrative. In other words, a self-conscious narrator "emphasizes the status of the text as artifice, provoking reflections about fictionality and textuality" (Rimmon-Kenan 101).

Because the layered narrative of *A Room* is important for both its narrative composition and the politics of the text, I also need concepts which help convey the hierarchal structure of the story and establish the narrator's position. Simply put, narrative levels are used to account for the notion of a 'story within a story', commonly referred to as embedding

or framing narratives. The typically applied method for analyses of narrative levels derives from Genette. His model includes the extradiegetic level, the diegetic or intradiegetic level, and the meta- or hypodiegetic level. The narrative act carried out at a first level is the extradiegetic one. Events told within this first narrative are at the intradiegetic level. When events are told inside the intradiegetic narrative, they are metanarratives at the metadiegetic level. Using the word diegesis, Genette refers to a universe above the storyworld, the storyworld and a second degree universe within the storyworld (1988 87-94). David Herman gives a concise outline of how this affects the narrator: “narrators are extradiegetic if they do not inhabit the storyworld evoked by their discourse [...], intradiegetic if they are characters within a storyworld and tell a story within the story [...] or hypodiegetic if, within an embedded narrative a character tells yet another story” (65). *A Room* appears to be narrated by one voice. As my analysis will argue, however, this is but one way to look at it. Due to the nuances of the storytelling in the text, means of unveiling narrative layers are instructive.

In the process of narrative communication there also needs to be a receiver: a narratee. Roughly the same parameters we use to classify narrators may be used for narratees: “[a] covert narratee is no more than the silent addressee of the narrator, whereas an overt one can be made perceptible through the narrator’s inferences of answers [...], the narratee’s actual answers [...] or his actions” (Rimmon-Kenan 105). Narrative levels also apply to the narratee, and the narratee can reflect upon the narrator and vice versa. According to Chatman, the general idea is that “a given type of narrator tends to evoke a parallel type of narratee” (255). For Rimmon-Kenan, Genette has a similar view: “[t]he narratee is, by definition, situated at the same narrative level” (103). Although I recognise the parallel relationship between the narratee and the narrator, I will nonetheless also keep to the somewhat looser definition that “the narratee is the agent addressed by the narrator” (Rimmon-Kenan 105). In this sense, the narratee may be a character participating in the narrative but need not be.

The problem of approaching the narratee with a fixed framework becomes especially evident when the reader is taken into account. Although the reader only seldom is addressed directly by the narrator, he or she is nevertheless the last instance in the communicative process. To my mind, as long as the text at hand was written to be read, the reader must be understood as a kind of narratee. Thus, I would argue that all of the concepts outlined in the above affect the last instance, the reader:

[T]exts are designed by authors in order to affect readers in particular ways; that those designs are conveyed through the words, techniques, structures, forms, and dialogic relations of texts as well as the genres and conventions readers use to understand them; and that reader responses are a function of and, thus, a guide to how designs are created through textual and intertextual phenomena. (Phelan 5)

Because *A Room* in the most obvious sense is a text constructed to convince the reader of an idea or a message, the way in which textual components affect this process is of interest. Furthermore, there are important textual features which the reader does not ‘respond’ or even detect. But this does not necessarily mean that they are irrelevant. Woolf’s texts are examples of texts where not all the features are visible to the reader. Thus, there may be unexplored territory. As Judith Allen states about Montaigne and Woolf’s readers, they “have struggled with the exceptionally intricate narrative and rhetorical strategies [...], strategies that express and enact the inextricable connection between their aesthetics and politics, but may not be readily perceptible to their readers” (20). In my analysis, I address such strategies in order to unravel the possible connections between aesthetics and politics. However, I do not want to underestimate the abilities and power of the general reader and my discussion relies on Woolf’s notion of the common reader: the reader that “reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others”, the reader who is “guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole – a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing” (E 4 19).

1.4 Specification of Argument and Chapter Outline

The preceding sections attest to a somewhat extensive theoretical framework. Because the overarching prospect of my argument involves finding connections between formal features and ideological ideas, however, this conceptual backdrop is crucial. Similarly, because of my insistence on focussing on the actual text, the method of close reading is indispensable for my discussion. The following chapters are divided according to the narrative facets of the text. Because my thesis is a narrative reading of *A Room of One’s Own*, I will accentuate the narrative dimension and use the striking narrative strategies to work my way into the text. As presented in my introduction, these include the choice to narrativise the argument, the application of a first-person narrator, and the choice to partly rely on and activate elements of fiction. At first glance, these are simple concepts but typically for Virginia Woolf’s texts, there are few absolute answers. As the title of this chapter suggests, *A Room* requires an approach which allows for contradictory or opposing notions to come into play. In *A Room* fiction appears as history, and what might be real or true is perceived of as fiction. The narrator applies the monumental first-person pronoun yet she is also fluctuating and remains fluid. The structure of *A Room* relies on a narrative movement which nevertheless coexists alongside essayistic fragments.

I begin my analysis by addressing the structural features at work in *A Room*. Woolf evokes conflicting structures, discourses, and language as a means of bringing her feminist message forth on several levels. Chapter two provides a detailed analysis of how the narrative comes about and how it affects the reader. By choosing to present her argument in terms of a story, Woolf relies on a kind of communication more commonly associated with fictional prose. I argue that while the reader is guided by a 'narrative illusion', he or she is also prevented from accepting this illusion unconditionally. Here the combination of essayistic and narrative features plays a crucial role, as well as the apparent opposition between story and argument. Within this topic I will address the seemingly contradictory modes of experience and theory, fiction and expository prose, argumentative, academic, and artistic writing. I will explore why and how these oppositions are reconcilable within the polemical structure of *A Room* and why they are crucial to our understanding of the text.

Chapter three turns to the 'fictional persona' that Woolf chose as the mediator of her essay. Using concepts from essay theory and narratology, my analysis links the narrator to a communicative function and a political one. Due to the complexity of the narrator, this task demands a meticulous attention to detail. I argue that narrative and textual details are decisive for common assumptions about the narrator in *A Room*. Critics such as Laura Marcus, Judith Allen, and Anna Snaith all celebrate the multiplicity and dynamics of Woolf's speaker(s) but do not always provide the close readings needed to support such assumptions. Thus, in order to locate textual evidence for the narrator's many functions, the findings in this chapter will be founded on a quite extensive analysis of Woolf's infamous 'I'. I approach the text from various perspectives pertaining to dialogue and explore the communication between the narrator and the narratee, the teller and the listener, the essayist and her reader. The presence of various voices renders a possibility for communication across common boundaries. Succinctly put, my argument is that the narrative composition allows for these voices to come into existence. There is an ongoing interplay between the fictitious 'I' and Virginia Woolf herself.

This tension between a fictional voice and Woolf's own provides the basis for Chapter four, where I argue that Woolf constructs an alternative line of history where her own life is possible to locate amidst the experience of others. Here, the various conceptions of fiction and reality also play a crucial part. What appears as a negotiation between the fictional and the autobiographical is an effect of the narrative strategy to rely on fiction. The use of fiction to present an argument closely linked to, and provoked by, historical reality blurs the distinction between what is fiction and what is not. In Woolf's essay, the conventional understanding of

'reality' is challenged, and the boundaries as well as the opposition between fiction and reality are dissolved. This has implications for the way in which I approach the notion of fiction. *A Room* is a work of nonfiction but the narrator asserts that lies will flow from her lips and that what she will describe has no existence (6). Because of the generic classification, the assertion of fictionalisation calls our attention to what might be real. Places where Woolf's life, historical reality and the text intersect become as important as the imaginings of fiction. As a consequence, my discussion addresses ways in which fiction, history, and the 'personal Woolf' are interwoven. I argue that, by blurring the distinctions, she reworks the male dominated discourses of the past, challenges realist epistemology, objective factuality, and provides an alternative view of fiction and reality: Woolf dissolves the boundaries and rejects the notion of absolute truth.

2 Fusion of Discourse: Structure and Language

2.1 Fiction and Nonfiction – Generic Complications

In her section on narratological approaches to Virginia Woolf, Melba Cuddy-Keane draws our attention to the structure of *A Room of One's Own*. She relates the story of how, in 1933, one of Woolf's common readers "devised an elaborate colour graph diagramming the rhythmic pattern formed by twenty recurring motifs in *A Room of One's Own*" which perceives the underlying narrative structure and "the way its *a-logical* power accumulates through an interwoven 'pattern' of repetition and recurrence that seems 'purposed' although perhaps not 'what we commonly call conscious'" (2007 16). These observations almost seem contradictory. On the one hand, the description quite succinctly pinpoints the illogical forces at work in the essay. Yet at the same time, words such as 'pattern', 'recurring', 'rhythm', and 'purpose' propose the presence of something which is possible to systematise, something that is rational or logic. The divergence between these modes of discourse suggests the coexistence of contradictory forms. This coexistence provides the starting point for the unfolding discussion in this chapter. *A Room* can be considered as an essay, a narrative, an argument, or a polemical text. It borrows and appropriates constituent elements of fiction, expository prose, scientific and academic writing, but also from imagination and art. Proceeding from Woolf's choice to narrativise her claims in *A Room*, this chapter sets out to approach the employment of structural contradictions and oppositional discursive elements at work in the text. I discuss how and why narrative and essayistic structures work together, and why both are crucial for the reading of the text and the mediation of the argument or message. Since the apparent opposition between narrative and essay resembles generic differences pertaining to oppositions between the methods of fiction and nonfiction, such an inquiry must also be directed towards discourse and language.

To begin with, the paradox at hand is the evident opposition between the categorisation of the text as an essay and its deployment of a narrative structure. According to Harold Abbot, as presented in my theoretical framework, a traditional narrative is defined in terms of a sequence of events, often causally linked together by a plot. Conversely, the essay is usually distinguished by a fragmentary nature and as a form independent of narrative sequence which refuses to resolve thought into logical reason. While the textual movement in a traditional narrative is thought of in terms of linearity; the essayistic movement is distinguished by its simulation of experience and the process of thinking. Whereas traditional narratives are thought of as pushing forward, towards an end and a 'resolution', the essay's

emphasis is on the journey. As Leila Brosnan puts it, in *A Room* the “story coexist with the traditional remit of the essayist, to realise the experience of the essayist in the process of writing” (138). Woolf’s narrator follows one route from beginning to end but she also follows more than one train of thought. The main storyline coexists with essayistic digressions.

Most critics have tended to give Woolf’s ‘essayistic swerves’ the most attention. The way in which the narrator metaphorically, mentally, and physically swerves off the path “across a grass plot” (7) is considered one of the main violations of patriarchal norms and dominant modes of writing. Tracy Seeley, for instance, holds that the strategy in *A Room* does not depend on logical structures “but on the illogic of tropes” (31). Similarly, Cuddy-Keane relates the movement in the essay to what she calls the ‘trope of the twist’. This view is convergent with Judith Allen’s indication that the frequently recurring word ‘but’ always opens for new directions (58). Drawing on Kristevaen connections between structures and symbolic orders, Toril Moi argues that “Woolf’s refusal to commit herself in her essays to a so-called logical form of writing” (11) indicates a break with dominant practice. Focussing on the narrative dimension of *A Room*, Eric L. Berlatsky outlines that Woolf, through an antagonism to plot, insists not only on an “explosion of the narrative form, but also a rejection of patriarchy” (53). While it is true that Woolf’s rejection of plot contributes to a political argument in many of her texts, the narrative in *A Room* can, in fact, be read as dependent upon plot. Thus, I argue that the political facet of *A Room* goes beyond a simplified rejection of this traditional structure. As alluded to in my introductory chapter, Woolf is often celebrated for her ability to occupy the position of ‘both and’ rather than ‘either or’, reflected in her works. Strikingly, Cuddy-Keane emphasises “the tension in Woolf’s writing between patterns of coherence and the destabilizing effect of fragmented structures” (2007 24). Nevertheless, the attention to discontinuities is what stands out in the critical debate.

As my present analysis aims to demonstrate, however, the essay reads as a story and is not difficult to define as a narrative. Rather than emphasising the discontinuities, I focus on the continuities and connections that make the narrative come about. Agreeing with Brian Richardson that “some causal connection is a necessary precondition of narrativity” (96), I want to argue and show how and why the narrative connections in *A Room* are crucial. Such causal connection provides what may be labelled a ‘narrative illusion’. In line with my overall argument, I discuss how the narrative structure has both a political and communicative function and effect. Succinctly put, my argument is that the narrative guides the reading, providing a smooth transaction of the ideas presented in the essay. Yet the very presence of a storyline suggests that every digression and interruption serve as a counter to the narrative.

Thus, there is a continuous negotiation between the essayistic and the narrative; their structural forces are constantly countered, questioned, and renegotiated. There is interdependency between the argument and the story, the essayistic and the narrative, between linearity and chaos. The first section of my analysis is a detailed discussion of how these forces come about. The opposition between argument and storytelling also poses questions about the modes of writing that are applied. In the clash between logic and illogic, linearity and chaos, it is not only structural questions that come to mind. From the clash between essay and narrative, the more general question of fiction and nonfiction emerges. This larger issue suggests that the affinities *A Room* has with both the story and the essay entail other generic complications. Thus, the second part of this chapter discusses the ways Woolf, through merging the discourse of the artist or novelist, journalist or critic, essayist, academic, and researcher bring about important parts of her argument.

2.2 Narrative and Essay – A Coexistence of Opposing Forms?

2.2.1 Structure: Storyline and Detours – Fragments and Unity

A fruitful place to start thinking about Virginia Woolf's choice to narrativise her argument is with James Phelan's definition of the narrative as rhetorical: "somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened" (3). If we think of a narrative as something with a specific *purpose*, both the communication and the 'fulfilment' of this purpose become especially important. A purpose behind the storytelling is made clear in the course of the first pages of *A Room of One's Own*:

But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction—what, has that got to do with a room of one's own? [...] All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point—a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved. I have shirked the duty of coming to a conclusion upon these two questions—women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems. But in order to make some amends I am going to do what I can to show you how I arrived at this opinion about the room and the money. (5-6)

In *A Room* we are told the story of how the narrator came to hold the opinion that women need five hundred a year in order to write. It is the story of how the argument she presents was arrived at. The story, then, is entangled with the argument and the action. 'What happened' is directly connected with the mediation of the so-called 'message'. This view is also reinforced by the fact that the essay title echoes the argument presented in this passage. Because of the categorisation of the text as essay, the notion of persuasion becomes important. As presented in the preceding chapter, essay theory connects the ideas in the essay to the reader. Claire De Obaldia sees the essay as a set of ideas addressed by an author to a

reader. Similarly, Carl Klaus holds that the notion of persuasion is at the centre of the essay. The essayist is engaged in persuading the reader of the vision he or she presents. From this perspective, and due to the text's reliance on the story, a potential 'fulfilment' of the text's purpose relies on a construction of the storyline.

If the very mediation of ideas in the essay relies on a story, merely addressing the reader is not enough. The storytelling will be dependent on the reader's ability to decipher the textual elements – to perceive the parts of the text in terms of a whole – in order to follow the progression of the argument. In this regard, the essayistic elements can be perceived as a potential threat. Despite the narrative's chronological appearance, the main story takes many detours and the narrator digresses into other stories. Recalling John Snyder, the path of the essayist is a side route outside the thoroughfare. Still, because the events are not ordered differently in the text ('narrative discourse') than their succession in the story ('story'), these digressions cannot be understood as anachronies in terms of analepsis or prolepsis.¹ And although the narrator recounts past historic events, these are presented chronologically in terms of her experience of them. Past historic events are told as she encounters them in her research. Yet the fact that the narrator does consult history can be perceived of as troubling with regards to time and space. As Rachel Bowlby puts it, "a general question immediately takes a narrative turn, as Woolf moves [...] from theory to the fictional ramble through 'Oxbridge', London, the British Museum and through the many byways of literary history" (16). In many ways, then, the reader is brought back and forth in time, and challenged in relation to the text's spatial dimension. Yet the reading of *A Room* cannot be aligned with the reading Woolf's novels. *Jacob's Room* or *To the Lighthouse*, for instance, are both known for constantly challenging the reader and her or his cognitive apparatus.

Thus, provided that the argumentation in *A Room* is dependent on the storyline, the manner in which the storyline comes about and is rendered clear for the reader is vital in order to see the connections between story and argument. As I will argue in the following both the temporality of the narrative and its spatial dimension have consequences for the way in which the reader interacts with the text and its ideas. The text is divided into chapters which not only disrupt the reading but also bring about important connections between the various elements of both story and argument. To elaborate on how these connections come about, the presence

¹ Strictly speaking, the narrator's story about how she reached her conclusion may be understood as an analepsis altogether because it preceded her lecture with regards to story-time. Because this analepsis for the most part includes the story within the frame as a whole, I will not explore this narrative aspect any further. Thus, the distinction between story and discourse – although crucial in narrative theory – will not be of utmost importance to the analysis of *A Room*.

of narrative cues and ties are particularly important. They provide the narrative illusion. The techniques used to maintain narrative coherence are especially prominent in the transition between chapters. Also, there are important textual strategies linked to beginning and the ending of a chapter.

Chapters one and two, especially, devote both space and thought to the construction of narrative. The ending of chapter one, when the narrator is going to bed after her day in Oxbridge, illustrates how Woolf or her narrator moves between chapters, negotiates story and argument, and also how she helps the reader's navigation in *A Room*:

A thousand stars were flashing across the blue wastes of the sky. One seemed alone with an inscrutable society. All human beings were laid asleep – prone, horizontal, dumb. Nobody seemed stirring in the streets of Oxbridge. Even the door of the hotel sprang open at the touch of an invisible hand – not a boots was sitting up to light me to bed, it was so late. (26)

After being ordered off the turf and barred from the library, after the luncheon, the change of season, the dinner, and her discussion with Mary Seton, the narrator finally ends her day. Following her musings on women and fiction, on *Lycidas*, on Christina Rossetti, on war, on the founding of the colleges – to mention but a few topics – as readers we are brought to some kind of stop. There is a pause in the essayistic deviations and wanderings of the narrator's mind. In the course of these few sentences, the reader is informed about where and when the chapter ends: situated in Oxbridge late at night. Though important because it brings the events of the day to an end in terms of closure, this example gains more significance once linked to the beginning of chapter two. In fact, making it explicit where and when the previous chapter ends has consequences for where the next begins:

The scene, if I may ask you to follow me, was now changed. The leaves were still falling, but in London now, not Oxbridge; and I must ask you to imagine a room, like many thousands, with a window looking across people's hats and vans and motor-cars to other windows, and on the table inside the room a blank sheet of paper on which was written in large letters WOMEN AND FICTION, but no more. The inevitable sequel to lunching and dining at Oxbridge seemed, unfortunately, to be a visit to the British Museum. (27)

Many consider the changing of scene as a strategy that destabilises any direction and movement in the text. Judith Allen, for instance, argues that the altering of location and setting is a leading textual technique which adds to the 'essayistic uncertainty' and repudiates "the rigidity and fixity of forms" (62). At this point in the text or story, however, examples such as this actually bring a sense of coherence to the reading. Rather than providing indeterminacy, this example informs the reader step by step: crucial aspects of both the story and argument are communicated to the reader. First of all, by contrasting the new scenery with Oxbridge, the reader is guided through the change of location. Making a clear connection between the new chapter and the previous events also suggests an inherent comment on the

text's temporality. Because the first chapter ends in the night, the next introduces a new day. In fact, the reader is even told that, unfortunately, the inevitable sequel to the visit to Oxbridge seemed to be the British Museum. The narrator thus makes an explicit comment on the sequencing of events, a comment which helps the reader to navigate in the story. Because the connection between story and argument is already established, such ties also enable the reader to navigate in the argumentative progression.

To elaborate, these examples provide a connection between Woolf's argument and the narrative ties which establish time and space. In the preceding example, the events in chapter one are not only presented as causally linked to those that are going to occur in chapter two, they are also presented as crucial for the text's ideological and political dimension. While the visit to Oxbridge only suggested questions, the narrator tells us, the British Museum should provide answers, or as she puts it, "the essential oil of truth" (29). This is particularly important because Woolf's argument is in part a spatial one, concerned with destabilising the patriarchal dominance usually connected with traditional male dominated institutions. In relation to the British Museum, Anne Fernald explains how "the Reading Room becomes a memory image dedicated to destroying the complacent acceptance of the all-male canon of English literature" (79). Such an interpretation emphasises the interdependency between Woolf's argument and the spatial dimension so crucial for the narrative.

Accordingly, space is used not only to guide the reader through the narrator's story but also through her argument. This is evident several places in this chapter. After establishing the setting, the narrator drifts off into the many opinions of men. Samuel Butler's view of women, Napoleon and Mussolini's take on them, Dr. Johnson's understanding of them, and Professor von X's *The Mental, Moral and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*, are but a few of the many detours and deviations from a direct course of action. The reader is nevertheless dependent on the storyline in order to follow the argumentative progression. The striking examples are those that reinforce the narrator's argument that "England is under the rule of the patriarchy" (35) while simultaneously evoking the ongoing story. One illustrative instance is when the narrator is buried in the many opinions men have had about women. Exasperated by all these opinions or 'truths', she makes a halt and looks about in the British Museum: "[b]ut, I continued, leaning back in my chair and looking at the vast dome" (31). Similarly, she evokes space when wondering why the professors are angry: "[h]ere was a puzzle that would last all the time that it takes to be served with food in a small restaurant somewhere near the British Museum" (34). And later, when she has found that the patriarchs' desire for greatness is instilled in them through their education, she finds herself on a suited location:

“[w]alk through the Admiralty Arch (I had reached that monument), or any other avenue given up to trophies and cannon, and reflect upon the kind of glory celebrated there” (40).

By directly and indirectly calling forth monumental patriarchal spaces and institutions, the narrator entangles her research with the spatial dimension of the narrative. As the preceding examples illustrate, the narrator begins her research and is overwhelmed by all the questions in the vast dome of great thought. Although the narrator’s interrogations develop towards lunchtime, her thoughts are nevertheless still in the shadow of the British Museum. Later, on her way home, when she has come to some conclusions about money and power, the physical and geographical location of the Admiralty Arch reflects the narrator’s thoughts. These claims illustrate what Tracy Seeley calls the ‘spatial digression’ at work in *A Room*. In common with Fernald, Seeley holds that space reinforces patriarchy’s dominance and that examples such as these “suggest [Woolf’s] heightened awareness of patriarchy’s spatial rule” (33). Seeley further refers to these spaces as a strategy used in order to reach other alternative spaces away from the notion of ‘truth’, “a strategy of digression which leads elsewhere” (36).

Although this spatial practice opens new paths for the narrator, however, I would argue that it also reminds the reader of the ongoing narrative in the text. From this point of view, the essayistic swerves are always countered by narrative indications reminding the reader of the main story. First, the narrator has been deep down in her own thoughts, in the thoughts of others, buried in abstract notions. The mentioning of the dome, however, reminds the reader of where the narrator is situated. Thus, the reading is brought back to something solid that evokes the storyline.² Critics have noted that the word ‘but’ serves as a possibility of a new direction, but the example from her musings in the British Museum actually underscores how the same word indeed may bring the reader back to the narrative illusion. Similarly, when signalling that it is lunchtime, the narrator relates this both to time and space. In the example where she informs the reader that she has reached the Admiral Arch, she even comments on her on physical movement. The verb ‘reach’ suggests motion both in terms of space and time, and aids the reader to keep track of the narrative progression.

In addition to pinpointing space’s relevance for the argument, the preceding analysis highlights that space also is dependent on time, and that such a relation guides the text forward. This point can be elaborated by examining how the beginning and ending of chapter two are related to each other in terms of both a spatial and temporal dimension. Early in the chapter Woolf’s narrator expands her initial description of London and the British Museum:

² This reflects Woolf’s general interest in the relationship between the transitory moment and the factual world, between the ungraspable and concrete, between the intangible and palpable ‘solid objects’.

“London was like a workshop. London was like a machine. We were all being shot backwards and forwards on this plain foundation to make some pattern. The British Museum was another department of the factory” (28). Towards the end, when a description of London is included once again, the narrator, recalling the earlier description, gives closure to the day’s events:

Lamps were being lit and an indescribable change had come over London since the morning hour. It was as if the great machine after labouring all day had made with our help a few yards of something very exciting and beautiful – a fiery fabric flashing with red eyes, a tawny monster roaring with hot breath. (41)

In this manner the second chapter represents the events of the day; it started out in London during the morning and finishes off with a description of the change that has taken place. By linking the account of London to the description of morning and evening, the ending of the chapter is anchored in its beginning. Because of this, the fact that the reader has been brought through parts of the physical landscape of London and the mental landscape of the narrator, does not destroy the narrative coherence or illusion. The inclusion of the narrator’s research, the story of her aunt, her own story, factual details and an imaginary professor are rendered without losing the reader. By relating time’s effect on London, Woolf also relies on the cycle between night and day and a sense of unity prevails. Because this is a temporality familiar to the reader, the representation of both a story and an argument is facilitated.

Establishing the structure and pattern for the way in which events unfold and relate to each other can both be seen in light of the definitions I provided in my introductory chapter and as well as general theorising about reading. Readers use words, techniques, structures, forms, and generic conventions to make sense of texts. Thus, the reader’s preconception and expectations guide the reading. This aspect of the reading becomes particularly important in relation to elements that are familiar to the reader. According to Wolfgang Iser, the “repertoire of familiar patterns and [...] allusions to familiar contexts” (288) guide the reader and her or his immersion in the more unfamiliar aspects of stories and texts. With regards to *A Room* and my preceding analysis, two patterns distinguish themselves. First, there is the reliance on a temporality that is similar to the reader’s own conception of time. By evoking the cycle of day and night, the reader is enabled to relate every event in the story to a known temporality. More importantly, as readers we understand that *A Room* is dependent upon plot. The way in which events unfold is guided by an overarching plan. In fact, the narrator provides her reader with the plot for the some hundred pages following her introduction. Thus, despite Eric L. Berlatsky’s insistence on *A Room*’s antagonism to plot, Woolf does provide narrative progression and an expectation which pushes the action forwards. As I will come back to, however, this structure is not the only one. With regards to the connections

between the text and the political dimension, there are other structural aspects that stand out. But the traditional notion of a plot is crucial for the text's communication of Woolf's ideas and thus indispensable for the reading.

The notion of familiarity is also important for other ways in which my analysis finds resonances with other modes of thinking about narratives. In relation to Mary-Laure Ryan's definition, the reader's ability to construct a mental image of 'Oxbridge', 'Fernham', the British Museum and London is the key element in the text. By relying on spaces it is likely the reader has some preconception of, Woolf helps the reader to construct the mental image. Consequently, the reliance on already existing places with ideological and political connotations both facilitates the reading and the mediation of the argument. This is also a valid point to make about the narrator. Thinking of narrative in terms of Monica Fludernik's 'experientiality', the narrator as a human-like agent becomes especially important. This underscores the narrator's importance as someone the reader can relate to and suggests that she is crucial for the reading and the argument. As I will return to in the following analysis and in chapter three, the narrator is indispensable for the reader's interaction both with the text and the ideas it presents. These observations do not only establish that the text is a narrative, but also show how important both space, time, and the narrator are for our understanding of the text. When having something familiar to rely on, the more unfamiliar aspects of the text are easier to grasp. This function of a familiar pattern opens for elaboration and mediation of the more complex facets of the argument and idea.

When the text has established a familiar experience, pattern, and space, a rhythm and a sense of temporality, the narrative and argumentative movements change. In fact, the very foundation of the narrative illusion allows for the narrative construction to be complicated. Connections such as the one found between chapter one and two, and between the beginning and the ending of the latter, are not made explicit in the same manner in the following chapters. As the third chapter begins, the reader is not informed about where or when the action is taking place. After two paragraphs, however, we are told that Professor Trevelyan's *History of England* is taken down from "the shelf where the histories stand" (43) and consulted in order to find some answers to the posed questions about women and fiction. Because chapter two ends in the evening, when the narrator is on her way home, and due to the reference to the book on the shelf as means of finding answers to the questions, chapter three introduces a new day of research in the British Museum. And with this example there is a change in how the chapters are divided. Whereas the preceding chapters have covered one

day each (leaving out the 'introduction'), the patterns of the linking and sequencing of events are changed.

The strategies used to relate chapters three, four and five to one another suggest that the day beginning with the former lasts throughout the latter. This observation is supported by the ending of chapter three and the beginning of chapter four. The last sentence in chapter three initiates a process to be carried out into the next: "[i]f ever a mind was incandescent, unimpeded, I thought, turning again to the bookcase, it was Shakespeare's mind" (58). By using the progressive form of the verb 'turn', Woolf highlights the immediacy of the process. The first sentence of chapter four continues this process when starting thus: "[t]hat one would find any woman in that state of mind in the sixteenth century was obviously impossible" (59). This continuation is also signalled by use of the deictic reference 'that' when the narrator refers back to Shakespeare's mind. The sentence may also represent what the narrator is thinking when 'turning again to the bookcase'. The first sentence of the chapter refers back to the last in the previous chapter, and the activity in chapter three is continued into the next. Thus, even though the narrative composition has changed, there are still cues the reader can pick up on and which reinforce the narrative illusion.³

Continuing the same kind of narrative analysis, I find that a similar transition occurs between chapters four and five. Chapter four ends with the narrator musing over the questions about women and fiction:

And yet, I continued, approaching the bookcase again, where shall I find that elaborate study of the psychology of women by a woman? If through their incapacity to play football women are not going to be allowed to practise medicine –

Happily my thoughts were now given another turn. (78)

The last sentence could easily have been the beginning sentence of chapter five, but instead, the first sentence of the fifth chapter is a continuation and explanation of the last sentence of chapter four: "I had come at last, in the course of this rambling, to the shelves which hold books by the living; by women and by men; for there are almost as many books written by women now as by men" (79). These quotations illustrate that the day started in the British Museum in chapter three is continued into chapter five.⁴ Although there are narrative cues and hints between and within these chapters, the reader is to a lesser extent guided.

³ I am not suggesting that the general reader necessarily picks up on this consciously. As Woolf relates it in "How Should One Read a Book?", however, there is more than one process going on simultaneously in the process of reading. Narrative cues also guide the more unconscious activities of reading.

⁴ The observant reader will now have recognised that there is a discrepancy between my analysis and the narrator's own statements. According to the storyline and its narrative ties, the story has hitherto covered one day in Oxbridge, one day of research in the British Museum, and this new day of research in the shape of chapters

There can be many suggestions as to why the structures of the chapters seem to change. One might argue it is only natural for the connections between events and chapters to develop or change in the course of a text. However, it is difficult to ascribe structural matters to coincidences when it comes to the works of an author who constantly thought about her audience and who revised over and over again. In relation to this particular aspect, one proposition is made by Kathleen Wall. She argues that these middle chapters “present a literary history of women” and that they “constitute the kernel of the lecture, indeed they rather conform to Woolf’s description in her first paragraph about what she imagines her audience to expect” (189). From this perspective, the preceding chapters serve as a frame leading up to this lecture. Another suggestion might be merely a functional one: because the reader now is familiar with the narrative and temporality of the essay, he or she is less dependent on narrative cues. Additionally, this change signals Woolf’s trust in the reader. She had a lot of respect for the common reader and by reducing the narrative hints and ties she avoids being didactic and authoritative. By gradually decreasing narrative reminders, she provides the reader with autonomy. At any rate, these chapters cannot simply be understood as confirming the lecture Woolf’s narrator alludes to in the beginning. As I will return to in my next section, one of the political aspects of the text is Woolf’s deconstruction of the traditional lecture.

Approaching the end of the overarching storyline and the narrative configuration, the sixth chapter reveals Woolf’s concern for the reader and her or his encounter with the text. By the last chapter, the day lasting throughout three chapters has ended, and we are introduced to a new day. The beginning of chapter six gives a thorough specification of where and when events in the chapter are taking place:

Next day the light of the October morning was falling in dusty shafts through the uncurtained windows, and the hum of traffic rose from the street. London then was winding itself up again; the factory was astir; the machines were beginning. It was tempting, after all this reading, to look out of the window and see what London was doing on the morning of the 26th of October 1928. (94)

Through the use of the phrase ‘next day’ the reader is easily told how this chapter and its events relate to the previous ones. It should also be noted that the use of a new London description can be traced back to the same kind of description at the beginning of the second chapter. Thus, this initial part of the chapter functions both to specify where and when the action is taking place, and also to connect it with the rest of the text before its argument begins. Accordingly, the reader is reminded of and placed within the overarching storyline

three to five. This is not important, but it is nevertheless a curious observation. Maybe Woolf is tampering with the temporality in *A Room* after all.

before he or she is immersed in the complex idea of androgyny, the rebuke of men's dominance through the use of the capital 'I', and the narrators 'peroration'. The reminder of a storyline facilitates the presentation of an argument.⁵

The overarching storyline plays a crucial part of the reading process. The reader is guided through the narrator's story both in regards to space and time. Because the storyline functions as a 'lifeline', it helps the reader to navigate in Woolf's complex argumentative progression. Despite the prominence of the main story, however, it seems as if the content, subject matter, or substance for Woolf's argument is located outside this linear and temporal progression. While the main story is moving forward, there are other movements going on as well: the story takes a lot of detours and the narrator digresses into other stories, into history, into fiction and her own musings on the subject of 'women and fiction'. When considering the text from an essayistic angle, the material for the argument is mainly found in the deviations from the direct course of action. In other words, the storyline might guide the reader but the essayistic swerves bring about the ideas.

This may be the reason why the essayistic twists and turns are the structural features that have been treated more thoroughly by critics. Prominently, critics have noted that the narrator enacts parts of her argument through the many interruptions and obstacles she encounters in her story. Particularly, when she is trespassing on the turf in Oxbridge, her thought is interrupted. Patriarchy, in the shape of the Beadle, directs her off the turf and sends her "little fish into hiding" (8). The same goes for how she is barred from the library and her anxiety that Sir Charles Biron is lurking behind the curtains during her talk. Laura Marcus connects such events to the fact that "[p]hysical experience [and] material conditions [...] are in no way separate from intellectual and creative life, but shape its possibilities" (2004 47). The ways in which conditions shape life are also reflected in how they shape the text. These interruptions serve to give the essay a different structure than in a patriarchal tradition. Because men had more privileges, and thus freedom of mind, their 'thinking on paper' would probably not include the same kinds of swerves. Their change of direction would perhaps be initiated by their own thought, not by an external authority.

This understanding can be elaborated by looking at generic expectations and the composition of the essay. Wall, for instance, approaches changes of direction as 'accidents' or 'frustrations' and uses this to show the artificiality of Woolf's argument: it has the

⁵ The way this quote is linked to the preceding text is also affected by the specification of date. The use of such a specification allows for a consideration of exactly when the prior events are said to have taken place. Knowing that this morning is the 26th of October 1928 will enhance the reader's retrospective thinking and reading. This aspect points to the tension between fiction and reality which is my main concern in chapter four.

“*appearance* of an inductive argument that is ‘discovered’ rather than constructed” (189). The way she sees it, “the argument of *A Room of One’s Own*, presented though it is through a narrative, is a tightly constructed one” (188). Of course this is partly true. As my analysis shows, few things actually happen on ‘pure incident’. Bringing attention to the constructed nature of the argument in the text, however, is not to pay due regard to its generic categorisation as essay. It lies in the very nature of the essay to replicate the sense of spontaneous experience. Recalling Graham Good, the encounters, the writing, and thinking in the essay tend to be presented as experienced by the essayist. The essayist is supposed to provide the illusion that the order is as it occurred to her or him. Because the narrator of *A Room* is a woman and due to the authority of the Beadle, of Professor von X, and their dominance, her thinking is not unimpeded. However, it is also important to emphasise that her changes of direction are often initiated by the narrator herself. She both enacts her own empowerment and refers to the interruptions posed by patriarchy. When connecting the changes of directions in *A Room* with the generic traits of the essay, it becomes clearer how Woolf plays and utilises the genre to portend her argument in the very structure of the text.

The way in which Woolf’s argument is related to the text’s structure can also be understood in light of De Obaldia’s insistence that the argument of the essay is developed around encounters that the essayist experiences along the way. This suggests that it is not only the act or process of experience and thinking that is important. The topics that present themselves in this process are also decisive for the argument. In this sense, the notion of experience plays a crucial role both in terms of the essay’s content and in relation to its form. In *A Room*, however, experience manifests itself not only through the essayist or narrator’s experience. The narrator also puts her solipsist experience aside and lets other lives come to surface. The argument is structured around more than her individual experience. In fact, many of the topics that come to pass along the way occur in the form of other women’s experiences. In this regard, the wanderings off into other women’s lives are just as important as the narrator’s own experience. While situated in her own story, research, and thought, she nevertheless slides off into the lives of real and fictive women, into their obstacles, lack of personal experience and freedom of mind. In one detour we get to know Mrs Seton and her circumstances. As we are told: “[m]aking a fortune and bearing thirteen children – no human being could stand it” (24). In another we are immersed in Shakespeare’s unknown sister, Judith, who “was not sent to school [and] had no chance of learning grammar and logic” (49). Aspiring to be a female poet in the sixteenth century, she runs off to London. In a third, we learn of a potential woman writer, eager to earn her own money: “I can make money by my

pen. Of course the answer for many years to come was, Yes, by living the life of Aphra Behn! Death would be better!” (64). Furthermore, germs from the lives of the real writers such as Anne Finch, Dorothy Osborne, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Charlotte Brontë, are included, commented on, and related to the present situation.⁶

In many ways this reflects the fragmented nature of the essay, and the ways in which a number of subjective experiences transcend the personal. All the particular experiences that Woolf includes are used to say something general about the topic she addresses. To rephrase Good, “[a]lthough ‘[wo]man’ is realized differently in every individual, the study of one [wo]man is nevertheless one way to study ‘[wo]m[e]n’” (9). In *A Room*, however, there is a mosaic of women’s experiences that serves to comment upon the initial topic of ‘women and fiction’. The presence of more than the narrator’s experience becomes particularly important for the way in which Woolf both defies any definition of woman and the traditional notion of truth. As De Obaldia says about Montaigne’s essays, “universal Truth has been replaced by individual truths, that is, by individual experience in particular places and at particular times” (33). Because everything is merged with the narrator’s experience in the pace of her research, however, one cannot overlook the presence of her subjectivity and concept of self. These aspects suggest why *A Room* is categorised as an essay. The detours and experiences of women in fiction or history come together as fragments (or different storylines) creating a sense of unity. The structural makeup of *A Room* combines all its small parts into one whole which is presented in terms of an argument.

The fact that there is a connection between Woolf’s argument and the text’s structure, relates to Theodor W. Adorno’s insistence that the essay does not separate its material from its presentation. Here, then, there is another link between the form of the essay and its content and argument. Furthermore, also relating to Adorno, this is chaos set in system, where the organisation and movement of the fragments come together in a configuration. For Adorno, the idea is the force that structures the essay. In Woolf’s *A Room*, the argument and its reflections in the structure and form seem to adhere to the insistence on the idea. By contrast, Good sees the concept of the essayist’s ‘I’ or self as the only structuring force which can hold the various fragments of the essay together in a whole. Despite the presence of other lives, these come together in the narrator’s encounters with them. As I argue in the following chapter, the narrator’s ‘I’ cannot only be thought of in terms of the traditional essayist’s self. For now, however, the important point is the fact that Good’s insistence on the structuring

⁶ In the line of these experiences a quite different storyline emerges, the literary history of female writers as presented in *A Room*. This will be treated in the last chapter, where I look at Woolf’s alternatives to history.

function of the essayist's self is what lead him to argue that the essay is independent of narrative sequence.

Yet words pertaining to narrative, the temporal, and the spatial elements, as well as aspects of chronology and progression, are all over my analysis. In *A Room*, the thoroughfare is the main story, whereas the main content is in the detours. It is in these kinds of deviations from the plot or the main storyline that Woolf defies the conventional construction of both a logical argument and a traditional plot which both Adorno and Good hold to be characteristic for the essay. By contrast, however, the main road is such a prominent part of *A Room* that it cannot, as I have shown, be passed over in silence. Woolf's inclusion of such a storyline can also be seen as breaking with Adorno and Good's conceptions of the essay's structure. Thus, as the former part of my analysis argues, narrative can also be understood as a counter to the essayistic structure. The one counters the other so that neither is allowed to occupy a dominant position. These claims illustrates how the essayistic and narrative features of the essay both work together and oppose each other to enact and communicate Woolf's argument. On the one hand, her essay defies traditional ideas of fiction. On the other hand, by including a traditional plot, her essay appears more as fiction and story than the traditional idea of the essay. Thus the essayistic and the narrative dimensions are combined: Woolf is achronological and chronological at the same time, and allows the coexistence of linear and nonlinear movement. She both violates and adheres to generic standards, and opens a verbal space where various discourses are merged.

2.2.2 Discourse and Language: Expositions and Fictions – Imagination and Logic

Grounded in the opposition between narrative and essay, interesting questions emerge as to the modes of expression associated with these types of texts. It is not only the structure and form which allow us to see the generic fusion going on in *A Room of One's Own*. The manner in which a writer uses language also has importance for generic questions and interrogations of discursive elements. The characterisation of Virginia Woolf's essay as being neither one thing nor the other – not quite a traditional story but not a traditional essay either – is applicable to the language or discourse employed in *A Room* as well. On the one hand, the language is figurative, imaginative, and suggestive. On the other hand, it is straightforward, to the point, sometimes quite conventional and informative. Such variations and distinctions are reminiscent of essay theory's insistence that the essay hovers between conceptions of art and science. It is not fictional prose but it is not an academic article either. Consequently, the writer, Virginia Woolf, can neither be considered as an artist or novelist, journalist or critic,

nor an academic or researcher. Yet in the course of the some hundred pages which fill the covers of *A Room*, the language that Woolf employs and the discourses she lends from enable her to occupy all of those positions. And from these various positions she is able to argue, entertain, provoke, and immerse the reader in different spheres of life. The various functions of language and discourse lend themselves both to communicative aspects of the text and the more argumentative and political ones.

The text's affinity with fictional prose is a feature often highlighted in the critical debate. The narrator comments on this herself when telling her audience she will make "use of all the liberties and licences of a novelist" (6) and later that she will "defy the novelist's convention" (12). By incorporating the liberties and conventions of the novelist, the narrator positions herself more as a writer of fiction than a critic or essayist. From this perspective the text can be aligned with art rather than with genres of the factual. In "Virginia's Web," Geoffrey Hartman underscores the role of the writer as an artist in verbal texts. Referring to a scene in *A Room*, he asserts that "[i]t is the artist [...] who affirms a world where there is none" (40). With this observation Hartman draws our attention to the creating function of language. In *A Room*, it is the writer who, through language, guides us from the lecture setting to something reminiscent of a storyworld at the banks of the river in 'Oxbridge'. It is the writer who sets up the scene between the weeping willows one day "in fine October weather" (7) where the story starts to unfold. It is the writer, or even artist, that makes us aware of the many details of the surroundings such as the reflections in the water and the bushes glowing with the colours of golden and crimson. We are immersed into this world through descriptions reminiscent of fictional prose, and the text makes for an enjoyable reading. This is also true for the beginning of chapter two: "[t]he scene, if I may ask you to follow me, was now changed. The leaves were still falling, but in London now, not Oxbridge; and I must ask you to imagine a room, like many thousands, with a window looking across people's hats and vans and motor-cars to other windows" (27). After asking her audience to follow the change of scenery, the writer begins 'painting the picture', so to speak, asking her reader to rely on her or his imagination. As I will come back to in the next chapter, this example has importance for the reader's participation and engagement with the text. At the moment, however, the striking aspect is the reliance upon imagination and the ability of the artist to construct a world through language and aesthetics.

The construction of a storyworld simultaneously illustrates and reflects the creative function of language, which enable us to connect the text both with the essay genre and with more fictional ones. Recalling the creating function of language as one of my focuses in the

theoretical framework, these examples quite literally illustrate John Snyder's point about the essay being self-productive and creating a new dimension out of its textuality. Also, the preceding analysis signifies Theodor W. Adorno's notion of language's conceptualising function. Because of the emphasis on the essay genre as a genre between art and science, examples that give precedence to aesthetics and imagination are partly in conflict with a stable categorisation as nonfiction. Rather, the passages reveal traits that are more often associated with fictional prose. The tension between fiction and nonfiction, between essay and narrative, is at work and manifests itself in the very use of language and becomes particularly relevant if we connect the notion of fictional prose with Woolf's argument and the ideological facet of the text.

In the biography of his aunt, Quentin Bell relates descriptions of surroundings and setting to Woolf's argument and the purpose behind the text. He claims that because the text is supposed to set forth an argument, Woolf "must resist the temptation of following her fancy" (QB II 145) and not elaborate on the various aspects her narrator encounters during her argumentation. Although it is true that the narrator does not latch onto and starts to invent in relation to every little detail and curiosity she encounters, we lose important aspects of the text if we do not acknowledge its so-called 'fancies'. Equally interested in the separation between aesthetics and argument, Rachel Bowlby holds that Woolf would "assert that political argument – attempting to change the readers' opinions – is appropriate in a journalistic piece, but out of place in art" (221). While it is true that Woolf saw her fiction as more aesthetic than her essays, the combination of politics and art is at work in *A Room*. On her way to Fernham, for instance, the narrator makes use of the liberties of the novelist – aesthetic language, metaphors, and fantasy – but also emphasises the politics of her argument:

[P]erhaps the words of Christina Rossetti were partly responsible for the folly of the fancy — it was nothing of course but a fancy — that the lilac was shaking its flowers over the garden walls, and the brimstone butterflies were scudding hither and thither, and the dust of the pollen was in the air. A wind blew, from what quarter I know not, but it lifted the half-grown leaves so that there was a flash of silver grey in the air. It was the time between the lights when colours undergo their intensification and purples and golds burn in window-panes like the beat of an excitable heart; when for some reason the beauty of the world revealed and yet soon to perish (here I pushed into the garden, for, unwisely, the door was left open and no beadles seemed about), the beauty of the world which is so soon to perish, has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder. The gardens of Fernham lay before me in the spring twilight, wild and open, and in the long grass, sprinkled and carelessly flung, were daffodils and bluebells, not orderly perhaps at the best of times, and now wind-blown and waving as they tugged at their roots. The windows of the building, curved like ships' windows among generous waves of red brick, changed from lemon to silver under the flight of the quick spring clouds. (18)

This passage puts Bell's claim about Woolf's fancies into question. As the narrator puts it, her act of changing the season 'was nothing but a fancy'. Also, it pays due regard to details, beauty, and subtle nuances which let us perceive it as 'artistic'. The way Woolf sets up this

scene, with its constant attention to the fair garden, the warmth of the atmosphere, and the presence of emotions, could easily have been found in a realist novel, or perhaps even in a poem. Furthermore, the passage reveals a reliance on metaphor that is commonly associated with genres of fiction. In *A Room*, however, metaphors are connected with the argument. As Judith Allen shows, words such as ‘wild’ and ‘long grass’ are used metaphorically as a counter to the smooth turf and symmetrical surfaces in Oxbridge: “these qualities are aligned with cultural traditions that exclude women, with language and forms that cannot express women’s lives, and with a rigidity that negates creativity” (60).⁷ In this sense, in the very act of following her fancy, Woolf brings her argument about. By giving priority to the fictional over the factual, Woolf does not only provide the reader with a beautiful passage of prose. She also problematises the way in which insistence on truth or modes of the documentary gets in the way of imagination. This way the writing artist is provided with authority.

This excerpt may also be the one that most strikingly illustrates, but also complicates, Hartman’s notion of how the artist creates a world where there is none. The narrator tells her audience, “[a]s I have already said that it was an October day, I dare not forfeit your respect and imperil the fair name of fiction by changing the season and describing lilacs hanging over garden walls, crocuses, tulips, and other flowers of spring” (17). Yet after proclaiming that it is still autumn and that “[f]iction must stick to facts” (17), the writing artist enters the text and spring comes into play. Through the negation of one world, another comes into being. The artist affirms not a world where there is none, but a new world from what already is. This interpretation also complicates Adorno’s understanding of the conceptualising function of language. Woolf adds another layer to his emphasis on how concepts or representations depend on the factual. The change of season relates not to the factual but to what is already constructed. The new storyworld, so to speak, is borne out of a world or sphere which is already provided by textuality.

Such a view elucidates Woolf’s ability to take control over words, instil them with meaning, and even change their function and usage. When seen in light of the notion of conceptualising, Woolf plays with the act of negation comes to the surface. Negation usually denotes the opposite of existence or creation. Yet by eliminating the possibility of spring, the season comes into being. Likewise, Woolf’s narrator negates both ‘Oxbridge’ and ‘Fernham’ by presenting them as something that “has no existence” (6). Yet it is through the very

⁷ Here, I could easily walk astray and start pondering the various usage of such metaphors in this work. The purpose of including this example here, however, is simply to show that Woolf uses metaphors (which she is very well known for doing in her fiction), and to exemplify how this is related to her argument.

negation of them that these spaces are made perceptible to the reader and can play an active part in Woolf's argument. These points illustrate how Woolf's use of language contributes to the epistemological relativity of the text. What is and what is not is brought into question, and knowledge and existence are presented as instable categories.

In the preceding discussion Woolf is seen to take control over space and the presented world through the use of words and language. However, she does not only employ language in order to control and create space and atmosphere. Before noticing the couple that triggers the argument of androgyny, the narrator takes control over time:

At this moment, as so often happens in London, there was a complete lull and suspension of traffic. Nothing came down the street; nobody passed. A single leaf detached itself from the plane tree at the end of the street, and in that pause and suspension fell. Somehow it was like a signal falling, a signal pointing to a force in things which one had overlooked. It seemed to point to a river, which flowed past, invisibly, round the corner, down the street, and took people and eddied them along, as the stream at Oxbridge had taken the undergraduate in his boat and the dead leaves. (95)

In this passage the writing artist is set in motion, she enters the text, and seems to take control of time and stop it. Time appears to slow down or even stand still because every detail is rendered clear. It appears as one of Woolf's prolonged examples of the transitory moment. In addition to signifying the importance of language, this passage likens parts of *A Room* to ways in which the storyworld is rendered in novels such as *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. In both novels, the reader is challenged with regards to the representation of the discrepancy between time as subjectively perceived and time as objectively understood. This particular passage prolongs the moment⁸ and provides the reader with a pause which let her or him perceive the details.

Connecting the passage with some of Woolf's outstanding modernist novels elucidates reasons why *A Room* should also be celebrated for its interrogations of the objectively and subjectively perceivable, for its experiments with time, space, and movement, and for intersections with other modes of art. This view suggests that despite the reliance on a somewhat traditional structure and the notion of plot, modernist experiments are set in motion in other ways. From this perspective, the inventions of the artist, the contradictory representations and allusions to human perceptions in *A Room* must be considered a part of Woolf's modernist project. In her work on the feminist aesthetics of Woolf, Jane Goldman draws connections between aspects of Woolf's feminism and her use of colour, light, and shades. As Makiko Minow-Pinkney emphasises, "[f]or Woolf, the feminist and modernist aesthetics converge" (5). Thus, because experiments and violation of convention also play an important part in her feminism, it is difficult not to see these elements as equally important for

⁸ Various notions of the moment are important throughout Woolf's writing, both in her fiction and nonfiction.

the aesthetic and the politics of *A Room*. Recalling Toril Moi, this connection illustrates the possibility of locating politics in Woolf's textual practice. In other words, the affinities the text has with fictional and modernist prose are important for its argument. The aspects that liken the *A Room* to these categories should also be seen in light of the reading of the text. Undeniably, *A Room* provides a pleasurable reading with wonderful details and portrayals. Such a view seems to contract a common held assumption – represented by Bowlby and particularly Bell in my analysis – that aesthetics and politics exclude each other.

As noted in my introduction, however, the forces of imagination, fantasy, and fiction are not the only discursive features at work in *A Room*. By focusing on the beauty of language and the tendency to play with words, one might overlook Woolf's ability to also include linearity, logic, and rationality. In *A Room* Woolf does not only lend from the genres of fiction. At times, she also adheres to, appropriates, and comments on dominant modes of writing. In fact, she both incorporates and evokes textual practices strongly reminiscent of academic and theoretical writing. Furthermore, the very nature of the essay and its generic traits suggest that we should take other forms of discourses into account. Recalling Claire De Obaldia, theoreticians of the essay emphasise how the genre also relates to didactic, expository, or critical writing. Thus, it is not only the artist that is at work in this essay. In many ways, the critic, academic, or even researcher is also at work. At least, the form of the language and the methods applied are also reminiscent of what Graham Good calls the academic article, a practice where the employment of discourse and language is succinct, informative, and follows certain rules.

Such traits are in fact discernible from the reader's first encounter with the title. Despite the fact that it is the fictional strategies and the narrator's own comments on her use of fiction that readers most often notice, academic discourse also enters the text from the very beginning. In the previous section I noted that the essay's title can be seen as a steering light in the storyline which connects the storytelling with the argument. The footnote placed after the essay title, however, can be seen in relation to the formal discourses applied in the essay. After the title, before the actual text begins, there is a reference to a footnote: “* This essay is based upon two papers read to the Art Society at Newnham and the Odtaa at Girton in October 1928. The papers were too long to be read in full, and have since been altered and expanded” (5). In this footnote, the voice seems not to belong to a playful artist in the middle of her acts of invention. Rather, the voice appears to be the distant voice of the critic or researcher conforming to certain rules and informing the reader of the choices that have been made in the presented text. Accordingly, it is not only the qualities of narrative and fiction

that are present from the beginning, the formalities connected with texts in the academic genres, it seems, are also at large. From the beginning, then, the reader is placed in a textual practice of communication where discourses from various fields are utilised, negotiated and sometimes even commented on.

Footnotes are present other places in the text as well and they have various functions. First, there is the most traditional footnote, which is used for quotations as a reference to an author, the work, and the page number. Despite the fact that she includes quotations from others more than once, Woolf has only included one of these most standardised notes: “Cecil Gray, *A Survey of Contemporary Music*, p. 246” (56). Footnotes are also added to suggest further reading: “[s]ee *Cassandra*, by Florence Nightingale, printed in *The Cause*, by R. Strachey” (57). Second, the narrator also relies on the reference system of academic discourse when pertaining to facts she presents and adds in the essay. As S. P. Rosenbaum notes in his introduction to the manuscript versions of *A Room*, the typescript of the essay has “footnotes [that] are added to document the history of women’s colleges” (xxxvi). Examples include the quotes of Lady Stephen in *Emily Davies and Girton College* (1927) and R. Strachey in *The Cause* (1928), where we receive complementary information. Additionally, Rosenbaum draws attention to the fact that Woolf also added “sources on men’s opinions of women” (xxxvii), where the most striking articulations, perhaps, are Sir Egerton Brydges’, Desmond McCarthy’s, and John Langdon Davies’s. As I will return to in my chapter on the narrator, other voices add to the democratic facet of the text. With regards to the present discussion, however, the employment of footnotes likens the text to academic discourse or research.⁹

Directed more towards the rhythm of the language or even the organisation of the words, there are other curious inclusions of the discursive styles associated with celebrated and dominant ways of writing. At one point, the narrator makes us a list of the index in Professor Trevelyan’s *History of England*. This outline is presented in the linear and orderly fashion demanded of texts within the genres of expository prose and informative, theoretical writing: ““The Manor Court and the Methods of Open-field Agriculture . . . The Cistercians and Sheep-farming . . . The Crusades . . . The University . . . The House of Commons . . . The Hundred Years’ War . . . The Wars of the Roses . . . The Renaissance Scholars . . . The Dissolution of the Monasteries . . . Agrarian and Religious Strife . . . The Origin of English Sea-power. . . The Armada. . .” (46). For one, this excerpt serves to recount and emphasise

⁹ Recalling Good’s notion that “there are often quotations in the essay, but rarely footnotes” (6), a point could be to stress that Woolf bends the genre for her own usage. While worth noting, variations in the employment of footnotes, however, are not particularly uncommon.

the events that are regarded the major events of history. Because of its format, however, it seems that Woolf connects the style of the prose to the underlying values this outline carries with it. The linearity can thus be seen as connected with men's domination in the representations of history. Following this assumption, the value that is put upon events in the lives of women is presented by means of textuality. The ellipsis included between each entry may be understood as the unrecorded lives of women, and patriarchy's devaluation of such events. The inclusion of what appears as a chapter division in a major work of history is thus directed towards the exclusion of women from textual practices as well as their unrecorded lives in the collective memory presented through history books. Furthermore, the fact that Woolf includes this in her text, and because her narrator is a woman, the excerpt can also be read as opening this tradition for new actors and voices.

This last point is more tangible where the narrator enters into the topic of women and poverty. During these pages, she conjures the same kind of linear and orderly language, free from the whimsical manners of fiction. When referring to her notebook being scribbled over with notes, she also presents that "what followed was something like this" (30):

Condition in Middle Ages of,
Habits in the Fiji Islands of,
Worshipped as goddesses by,
Weaker in moral sense than, Idealism of,
Greater conscientiousness of,
South Sea Islanders, age of puberty among,
Attractiveness of,
Offered as sacrifice to,
Small size of brain of,
Profounder sub-consciousness of,
Less hair on the body of,
Mental, moral and physical inferiority of,
Love of children of,
Greater length of life of,
Weaker muscles of,
Strength of affections of,
Vanity of,
Higher education of,
Shakespeare's opinion of,
Lord Birkenhead's opinion of,
Dean Inge's opinion of,
La Bruyere's opinion of,
Dr Johnson's opinion of,
Mr Oscar Browning's opinion of, . . . (30-31)

Despite the insistence that her notes are messy, this list of the many topics encountered in the research is presented in a distanced, sequenced, and ordered language or voice similar to a list of index. In this sense, Woolf, through her narrator, appropriates the language of patriarchy and includes it in her own methods. This act suggests that she demystifies and dethrones the propriety of traditional masculine or patriarchal discourse, questioning it by reworking it.

As Naomi Black emphasises, Woolf ridicules the notion of research: “*A Room of One’s Own* gives an ironical account of research in the British Museum” (160-161).¹⁰ By either quoting patriarchal voices or appropriating their mode of writing into her own, the narrator does comment quite directly on the style, conventions, and methods of the genre ascribed to nonfiction. Patriarchal research is referred to as texts or lectures commonly concerned with gathering facts, compiling them, and presenting them in one manner or the other as related to truth. The method taught to the patriarch in his Oxbridgean education is presented in the shape of the student sitting next to the narrator in the British Museum. As a contrast to the narrator’s many questions, he is “shepherding his question past all distractions till it runs into his answer as a sheep runs into its pen” (30). Although she suggests that this kind of route to an answer would be preferable, she simultaneously rejects it as a fruitful approach. Rejecting the traditional notion of truth or any simple answer, she underscores that there are only questions, opinions, and suggestions. She tells her reader or audience that she will not come to a conclusion. Her ‘opinion’, she tells us, is not a conclusion but only “an opinion upon one minor point” (5-6). In this she also comments that she will not be able to fulfil the conventions related to the oral academic discourse, “the first duty of a lecturer to hand you after an hour’s discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever” (5). Similarly, she evokes the same kind of conventions when reaching the end of her ‘talk’: “[h]ere I would stop, but the pressure of convention decrees that every speech must end with a peroration” (109). For instance, although she follows conventions of the lecturer and continues with a ‘peroration’, this does not have the concluding essence of the end of a traditional speech.

Seen in light of my overall argument about communicative and political functions in *A Room*, there are some points to be made based on this analysis. First, the presence of academic and expository discourse in the essay may be seen as a rhetorical move. Enabling us to regard the textual makeup of *A Room* as strategically composed, such a view gains particular strength in light of claims regarding Woolf’s awareness of potential male readers. For instance, Michèle Barrett is one of the critics which suggest that *A Room* was “finely calculated to be attractive to men” (351). This is a well-known charge against Woolf’s textual strategies. In one sense, acknowledging that she does not quite manage the Oxbridgean discourse, yet showing that she adheres to certain rules, may have a disarming effect on a critical (contemporary) male audience. If this was the only effect she achieved through such

¹⁰ Black also contends that this act sets the stage for *Three Guineas*’s more direct attack on patriarchy.

inclusion, it would reinforce claims about Woolf's elusiveness. However, Woolf or her narrator does not only admit to her shortcomings. Rather, Woolf refers to certain conventions, evokes and includes certain styles and expectations, and then she wilfully violates them. Every violation of the traditional discourse that is conjured up can be read in terms of the political functions of Woolf's textual strategy. She turns the disadvantage of lacking the Oxbridgean education upside down, and plays it to her advantage. Because she lacks formal training, she is not bound by its rules, and can employ and merge discourses more freely. Thus, Woolf takes the autonomy of the artist into the realm of research.

The narrator does not only allude to, show how she is bound by, or comment on dominant discourses in terms of abstract violations. I would also argue that she employs the textual methods of patriarchy in order to undermine some of its ideas. In the initiation of Woolf's argument about anger, it is not the personal grievance of women that is at the centre, but the personal anguish of men. She enacts a logical reasoning and turns a patriarchal dominant claim against the practice of argumentation she encounters in the British Museum:

When an arguer argues dispassionately he thinks only of the argument; and the reader cannot help thinking of the argument too. If he had written dispassionately about women, had used indisputable proofs to establish his argument and had shown no trace of wishing that the result should be one thing rather than another, one would not have been angry either. One would have accepted the fact, as one accepts the fact that a pea is green or a canary yellow. (35)

The dependence on personal feelings and emotions is a disadvantage often ascribed to women. Preceding this passage, however, Woolf has indicated that such qualities can equally be assigned to men. The professors are angry because they want to keep their position as superior. Because of this wish, they argue passionately about the inferiority of women and are personally involved with their argument. As a consequence, Woolf argues, the reader does not think about the argument but rather of the arguer himself. This portends the faulty in the method of argumentation of men. Continuing along the same lines, the allusion to 'indisputable proofs' seems to be a comment on research and science's specific and strict rules for presenting facts as truth. If there are certain rules for presenting facts, Woolf seems to suggest, such rules should also apply to common assumptions about women. Accordingly, as my discussion suggests, the rules of the dominant tradition are not only incorporated and commented on, they are also utilised and played against the claims it presents.

2.3 The combination of various discourses – an Intangible Form

The analysis in this chapter has been concerned with ways in which opposing structures and forms coexist in *A Room of One's Own*, and how these relate not only to the politics of the

text but also to the reading. I have argued that the familiarity associated with the narrative structure is crucial for the reader's interaction with the text. Succinctly put, the mediation of the argument would not be possible without the reader relying on the storyline. I began my analysis with James Phelan's notion of the rhetorical narrative, where the communication is governed by a specific purpose. In light of the present discussion, however, it may be more appropriate to conclude that the narrative communication in *A Room* is gestured towards several *purposes*. In the most obvious sense, the narrative is constructed in order to mediate the material argument. The manner in which this mediation is conducted, however, directs attention to other layers and purposes of the essay and the way in which the argument is presented.

First, the reliance on a storyline both helps the reading and also connects the events of the essay with the argument. In this regard, both the temporal and the spatial dimensions have crucial functions for revealing patriarchal dominance. More importantly, the notion of a storyline revealed *A Room's* dependence on plot. While this traditional structure would have been common in a novel, the employment of plot in the essay is quite unconventional and highly original. Although Woolf opposed the traditional plot in her fiction, she applies it in the essay and breaks with common conceptions of the essay form. From this perspective, *A Room* can be aligned with Woolf's modernist novels which challenge the old form and create a new structure. Only in this regard, the traditional plot is what is unconventional. Second, the storyline is not the sole structure and is always countered by the digressions of the narrator. This double arrangement shows how the textual movement simultaneously pushes forward and digresses. By connecting the form with the narrator's experience, we have seen how the experience of women is reflected in the interruptions of the narrative. In many ways, this adheres to traditional ideas about the essay where the process of thinking and writing decides its form. Yet because of women's different conditions, the process of thinking was seen to affect the structure in a different manner commenting on impediments facing women.

Third, the combination of the essay's narrative and essayistic features creates a space where aesthetic language, beauty, and details coexist with the informative discursive practices similar to expository prose and academic writing. The notion of opposing forms and discourses echoes what Harvena Richter refers to as the gendered difference in discourses: "[m]asculine in its bent for abstract and logical thought, feminine in its intuitive grasp of relationship and their mythopoeic and metaphoric equivalents" (18). This view suggests that the combination and coexistence of such forms may be similar to Woolf's notion of androgyny as she presents it in *A Room*: "[s]ome collaboration has to take place in the mind

between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished” (103). Thus, it is worth noting that my analysis could have been directed towards androgyny and that this direction is a possible extension of the discussion. Without relating the combination of fictional prose and rational language usage directly to androgyny, such a fusion rather suggests a literary form where opposing configurations flourish. Furthermore, because the narrator occupies the position of a writer of fiction, an academic, a researcher, or an artist, the contradictory notions of irrationality and logic cannot be ascribed to the one or the other sex or gender in Woolf’s text.

Thus, Woolf both dissolves the boundaries pertaining to language and gender as well as the distinctions between fiction and nonfiction. Not just reflecting feminist claims about material conditions, the argument also reveals close connections between textuality and Woolf’s rejection of authoritative positions and power structures. The refusal to stay within categories reflects a democratic inclination in the usage of textuality: one form, structure, and discourse counter the other so that neither is allowed to occupy a dominant position. This tendency permeates the balance of fiction and nonfiction which I treat in chapter four, and is perhaps the most important feature of the narrator in the discussion that follows.

3 The Narrator: Dialogue and Self

3.1 The teller and the 'I' – Only a Device for Communication?

In many ways I build the preceding analysis around one short uttering made by the narrator of *A Room of One's Own*: “[t]herefore I propose, making use of all the liberties and licences of a novelist, to tell you the story of the two days that preceded my coming here” (6). However, this statement does not only signify the storyline and highlight strategies commonly applied in fiction, it also portends that the one who is telling the story, the narrator, will be active in the story or plot and thus linked to a character in the narrative. As such, the 'I' in *A Room* might be conceived of as a traditional first-person narrator whose purpose it is to relate or communicate a story, or she can be perceived of as the traditional essayist, whose 'I' is at the centre. I argue that this straightforward manner of defining the narrator is reductive and impartial. By contrast, this chapter sets out to approach ways in which the narrator's 'I' is not linked to one steady character or person and how this affects the representation of Woolf's own self. Furthermore, I propose to disentangle the dialogical aspects of the essay and show how different agents and voices come about and interact. I discuss why such interaction and the constituent elements of the narrator's 'I' are dependent on the narrative composition, the generic aspects of the text, and also how it involves effects on the reader and her or his participation in the text. My analysis contends that the communicative function of the narrator cannot be separated from the political one.

As presented in my introductory chapter, the narrator of *A Room* has come to be considered what one may label an infamous speaker. Even in criticism where the essay is only mentioned in an offhand comment, the narrator is almost always included. Aspects of the instability, multiplicity, and ambiguity associated with the narrator have been underscored and emphasised in numerous publications. More precisely, in extensive criticism scholars have brought about important contributions regarding Woolf's deconstruction of the self, her democratic and dialogic underpinnings, and the tension between an autobiographical 'I' and a fictive one. Laura Marcus, for one, calls attention to how “Woolf desubstantializes the 'I' throughout the text” (2004 49). Similarly, Anna Snaith comments that the “'I' of the narrator is dispersed, made multiple and hypothetical” (2000 47). As Toril Moi famously phrased it, Woolf thus “radically undermine[s] the unitary self, the central concept of Western male humanism” (7). For critics such as Judith Allen and Lisa Low the deconstruction of this unity is at the centre of Woolf's antiauthoritarianism. Low calls attention to how, in *A Room*

“Woolf refuses to claim authorship or authority” (265). Through my analysis, I argue that such claims will gain more strength when linked to textual elements and a narrative reading.

The refusal to claim authorship and take on one stable voice are some of the aspects that led to the earlier criticism set forth by critics such as Adrienne Rich, Tuzyline Jita Allen, and Elaine Showalter. These so-called identity feminists understand the personal to be a key ingredient in any politics and art concerning gender. Through the narrator’s comment that “‘I’ is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being” (6), Woolf is seen as to employ impersonality in order to remove herself from her own ‘I’ and femaleness. Similarly, her proposition of androgyny is deemed a “myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness” (Showalter 264). By relying on impersonality and androgyny, Showalter suggests that Woolf depersonalises and de-sexes the subject and finds means to represent “disguised or delicately parodied versions of [her] own experience” (282). Although important for the discussion Showalter’s book initiated, I have already proposed that it does not reflect the complexity of the narrator. Such views nevertheless pinpoint that the narrator can be regarded a rhetorical move Woolf employed to avoid using her own voice. Albeit more nuanced, Maria DiBattista emphasises that “she submerged her voice in that of an assumed identity [...] to profess her most personal views about writing, sex, feminism, literature, and power” (12). This cannot be entirely disregarded. In a letter to Ethel Smyth Woolf comments upon this herself: “[I]leave your own case out of it; theirs will be far far stronger. [...] I didnt write ‘A room’ without considerable feeling even you will admit; I’m not cool on the subject. And I forced myself to keep my own figure fictitious; legendary” (*LV* 195). In my discussion I argue that Woolf’s figure cannot be entirely fictitious and that the impersonal is balanced by narrative and textual cues which enable us perceive one of the voices as Woolf’s own.

Whereas Showalter emphasises *A Room*’s “conversational *surface*” (282, my emphasis), others understand the notion of conversation to be the very foundation of the text. In her work on Woolf’s essays, Elena Gualtieri highlights the fact that as a “notoriously ventriloquist text, *A Room* speaks with different voices to different audiences at one and the same time” (71-72). Directed towards dialogism and along the same lines, Melba Cuddy-Keane and Leila Brosnan, in particular, call attention to the communication that takes place within the essay. I argue that the presence of dialogue and the inclusion of a multitude of voices are dependent on the narrative composition and its many layers. Without actually showing how narrative levels are set in motion, Beth Rigel Daughterly, for instance, notes that Woolf “revolutionized feminist persuasion by creating a layered narrative” (101).

I begin my analysis with a detailed mapping of the various narrative concepts at work in *A Room*. The notions of an audience, narratees, multiple voices, and narrative levels are important for my argument that the narrator can be conceived of as stable and unstable, as static and dynamic, as singular and multiple, as individual and collective, real and fictive, anonymous and personified, and as personal and impersonal. These aspects are crucial for the unfolding discussion about Woolf's dialogue with patriarchy, the presence of many and fluctuating selves, and for an understanding of how the narrator affects the reader.

3.2 Speaker and Audience, Narrator and Narratee, Writer and Reader - A Multiplicity of Agents, a Myriad of Functions and Meanings

3.2.1 The Narrator and Her Audience: Foundational Distinctions

Due to the many ambiguities associated with the narrator in *A Room of One's Own*, it is quite difficult to find a proper place as to begin an enquiry. One possibility, which presents itself from the very beginning of the essay, is to use the concept of an audience as an entrance to the text. From this perspective, it is beneficial to approach the text as a frame narrative which starts off with a narrator addressing someone about questions regarding women and fiction: "BUT, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction – what has that got to do with a room of one's own? When you asked me to speak about women and fiction I sat down on the banks of a river and began to wonder what the words meant" (5). In this manner, the first sentence of the narrative makes it clear that the narrator is speaking to an audience and that she was asked to do so. Thus, my focus is on how a setting with an audience provides opportunities for dialogue. Further into this introduction, the narrator refers to herself as a lecturer: "I should never be able to fulfil what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer – to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth" (5). The fact that the narrator positions herself as a lecturer or speaker has great prominence. Furthermore, the first footnote also connects the action to a lecture: "* This essay is based upon two papers read to the Art Society at Newnham and the Odtaa at Girton in October 1928." (5). Because the asterisk which refers to the note is placed right after the essay title where the text is initiated, the action is understood to take place within a lecture and what follows must necessarily be the introduction to the lecture. Because the first sentences stages something similar to a conversation, however, one might also call it a talk. Therefore, in addition to communicating

the storyline to the reader, or evoking academic discourse, this footnote also serves to establish the setting of the essay as one of dialogue.¹

Thus, aspects of the narrator become clearer if we approach them in terms of the text's dialogic nature: as a narrative situation with an 'I' and a 'you' engaging in a conversation. Melba Cuddy-Keane treats the text in this way, and shows how Woolf inscribed the sense of active listeners into the text. Referring to the word 'but', which presupposes something preceding it, she emphasises the significance in that Woolf "encoded a dialogic audience in *A Room of One's Own* from the very first word" (1996 159). Similarly, Leila Brosnan relates the dialogical format to the narrative form and connects the narrator both to a *speaking* and a *writing* subject: "[a]s the speaker of the talk given to the students at Newnham and Girton, and the speaker/writer of the published essay, the 'I' is inaugurated in dialogue, and dialogue is integrated into the format of the essay" (137). Accordingly, there are many layers in the communication between the audience and the speaker, and there are different ways of understanding the notion of an audience.

The understanding of the audience can be further helped by Cuddy-Keane. By stating that "the intradiegetic readers are the women who attended Woolf's original talks [and] [t]he extradiegetic readers make up an unlimited number of possibilities" (1996 153), she identifies an audience inside and outside of the text. As I soon will return to, this may not be the most instructive usage of the concepts of intradiegetic and extradiegetic levels. Brosnan, for instance, finds that the 'I' is "internally dialogised as the four Maries and externally dialogised as lecturer and essayist speaking and writing to an audience" (137).² The narrator is thus perceived of as both an overt teller and a writing subject, and the recipients may both be understood as listeners and readers. By highlighting the dialogical aspect of the essay, both Brosnan and Cuddy-Keane raise the awareness of the narrator and the narratee, the teller and the listener, the essayist and her reader. As my analysis will make evident, this suggests dialogue across common boundaries. To show this, one should direct further attention to elements external and internal to the text or the story.

Amongst critics, there is yet another apparent way of understanding the notion of an audience. Michèle Barrett, for instance, stresses the text's connection with the lecture as well as bringing attention to the potential male audience: "[a]lthough – since the essay retains a

¹ Here, there is an opening to Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic or double-voice discourse. I align myself with Cuddy-Keane's stance that Woolf and Bakhtin's ideas were quite similar, even if Woolf did not articulate them as fully as did Bakhtin (1996 138). Because of my theoretical framework, I will not comment on this any further.

² The notion of 'four Maries' refers to the Scottish ballade 'The Four Marys' and the possibility that the opening and closing of the essay is done in the voice of its narrator, Mary Hamilton. This is a complex argument which is treated by critics such as Jane Goldman and particularly Vara Neverow.

sense of the talk to young women that it was based on – it seems most obviously to address women, it was also finely calculated to be attractive to men” (351). Similarly Alex Zwerdeling holds that, in *A Room*, “Woolf wrote for women while she addressed an audience of men” (242). He finds that twin needs in her feminist writings were “to vent her anger about the subjection of women and to conciliate the male audience she could never entirely ignore” (243). Such comments highlight the presence of an audience outside of the text in terms of critical male readers or even general scrutinising readers, which I will return to later in this chapter. For now, the prominent aspect emerging from these comments is the notion of a strategic composition of the essay. The strategic facet cannot be entirely disregarded but it should not be given sole prominence either. As will become clearer, strategic choices most often have a connection with the argument and formal violations as well.

As these critics and my comments suggest, an approach to the narrator can very well begin with her audience. Following this, Cuddy-Keane’s assessment of the extradiegetic and the intradiegetic audience is an interesting way into the text as narrative. But by drawing attention only to the distinction between the historical readers and the original audience, we overlook the storyline and the importance of the narrator’s story. As I argued in the previous chapter, the story and the storyline in *A Room* are crucial to the argument. When emphasising only the distinction between the readers and the audience of women, we might lose sight of other important agents which also function as recipients or narratees. An alternative way to look at it – and perhaps more in line with narrative theory – is to see the narrator’s story as the intradiegetic and the lecture setting as the extradiegetic. If we recall Gérard Genette, the highest level of the narrative, above the storyworld, is the extradiegetic level. The story of the two days preceding the lecture is told within the first story and thus localised on the intradiegetic level. This implies a connection between the two levels and poses interesting questions as to how the two relate to each other. In order to approach relevant questions, however, the different levels and their narrators need to be established and problematised.

First of all, there are important remarks to be made about the narrator in the lecture. There are several elements that complicate the text’s relation to historical reality, the narrator’s identity, and its generic composition. In my analysis, the extradiegetic narrator is the first ‘I’ we encounter in the text.³ She makes the opening remarks in the essay and, as I

³ The placing of the first ‘I’ as the extradiegetic narrator may be considered problematic by some. As this kind of narrator often is thought of in terms of an abstract concept only inferred by the reader from cues in the text, the presence of an overt teller might lead us to regard her as an intradiegetic one. Another requirement has often been omniscience, which gives the extradiegetic the narrative authority. Here, however, I choose to rely on Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan’s assessment of the adult Pip as the extradiegetic narrator of *Great Expectations*. As

will come back to later, makes the closing ones. Following Brosnan's consideration of the narrator as the speaker addressing an audience, the lecture can yet again be seen in connection with the footnote placed after the essay title. In this context, the footnote does not only contribute to the lecture setting; in many ways it also freezes the beginning of the text in space and time. Accordingly, the highest level of the narrative appears to be fairly close to historical reality. And because the footnote refers to and denotes the actual lectures Woolf held, it is difficult not to connect the extradiegetic narrator to Virginia Woolf herself. Furthermore, most of the 'introduction' to her story comes before the narrator's comments on the convenient uses of 'I'. This kind of preamble suggests that the ambiguity of the narrator's 'I' is not applicable to the first passages of the essay. If we connect this with essay theory, the narrator's 'I' first appears as quite conventional. The 'I' in the text can be said to function as in a traditional essay where the self or the 'I' is commensurable with the writer or essayist. Indeed, as I underscored in my first chapter, essay theory treats the connection between the essayists and the 'I' as a given. This facet is of course only part of the narrator's complexity. But it is nevertheless crucial to establish and note that the generic composition and extratextual elements let us perceive the narrator as Virginia Woolf.

If we follow this assumption, but still consider the essay in narrative terms, who we think of as the narrator has consequences for how we consider the narratee. And if we follow Genette and Chatman's stance that narratees and narrators are situated at the same level, the extradiegetic narrator addresses the extradiegetic narratee. Accordingly, if the highest level of the narrative is the lecture and the narrator on this level is Woolf, the narratee must necessarily also be connected with historic reality. From such a perspective, the narratee can be personified by E. E. Phare, who attended Woolf's Newnham lecture. Another attendee was U. K. N. Carter⁴ who can also serve as a personification of the narratee, situated in Woolf's contemporary and historic reality.⁵ Furthermore, if we regard the lecture and the story as two distinctive levels, there needs to be something that differentiates them. The notion of agents situated in a historic reality and a story embedded within this creates a contradiction between

Rimmon-Kenan relates it the adult Pip "is a higher narratorial authority in relation to the story which he narrates [and] when narrating the story he knows 'everything' about it" (96). Similarly, our narrator clearly communicates that she is above the story that is being told. By beginning with the story's ending – the opinion she has arrived at – she clearly signals the same narratorial authority and control associated with the typical extradiegetic narrator.

⁴ In his introduction to the manuscript of "Women and Fiction" S. P. Rosenbaum recounts the experience these women had of Woolf's Newnham talk (xv-xvi).

⁵ A representation can never replicate a historical moment. In particular, because there were two lectures or talks (at Newnham and Girton respectively), the text is a reworking. Nevertheless, these details evoke the lectures as one specific moment and provide a contextual connection which is treated in my next chapter.

something documentary and something which is a mere fictional representation, a negotiation between the nonfictional and the fictitious. As I will return to, it is in the tension between these two layers that the notion of personality and impersonality becomes a topic.

The relationship between the two levels becomes clearer towards the end of the speaker's or Woolf's introduction. The 'I' or narrator initiates a shift and there is a change in the narrative situation and of the narrator's identity or personae:

Therefore I propose, making use of all the liberties and licences of a novelist, to tell you the story of the two days that preceded my coming here—how, bowed down by the weight of the subject which you have laid upon my shoulders, I pondered it, and made it work in and out of my daily life. I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence; Oxbridge is an invention; so is Fernham; 'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being. (6)

The references to places of no existence, and the comment that 'I' is only a textual marker for a fictitious person, suggest that there is a transition from the narrator being Woolf to that of a fictive agent. This is revealed by how the narrator plumps right into the story. She situates herself in the middle of a new setting and gives herself a new identity: “[h]ere then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance) sitting on the banks of a river a week or two ago in fine October weather, lost in thought” (6-7). If one accepts that there is a change in the narrator's personae from a real person to a fictive one, a change in the realm where the story takes place must necessarily follow. Accordingly, these quotations do not only function as a shift in the narrator, but also as a movement from a representation of a historical situated moment a fictional story. It is a movement from one realm to another, from a 'real' but narrative world to a fictive narrative world. The passage signifies a transition from the frame of the narrative, the extradiegetic level, to the storyworld or the intradiegetic level.

Due to this shift and because of the narrator's explicit comments on her uses of the first-person pronoun, the first assumption about the extradiegetic narrator cannot be entirely correct. If we accept that Woolf is the narrator at the beginning of the essay, these changes are initiated by her, and in this sense she takes full control of the narrative and a superior role in relation to the text. Due to Woolf's own views of this kind of authoritative power and the “the dominance of the letter 'I'” (*AROO* 99), one must also look at it from another viewpoint. The narrator's comment about her use of the first-person pronoun may be seen as a contradiction of what has been found about Woolf being the narrator in the beginning of her essay. Because this statement comes at the end of the introduction it may refer back to the already applied use of 'I' and therefore negate its identity from the very beginning. This communicates Woolf's well-known reluctance to connect the first-person pronoun to a single unit or identity. It is a

refusal to subordinate her voice to the monumental patriarchal 'I': the "most respectable 'I'; honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding" (98). From this perspective the frame narrator or the extradiegetic narrator cannot be Woolf, but rather, as the narrator emphasises, she is only a textual marker for something without real existence. In other words, the fact that the narrator does comment on her use of 'I' may have a retrospective effect. If one considers the extradiegetic narrator a fictive agent with no important identity, the extradiegetic narratee must also be a constructed entity. Regardless of the distinction between fiction and so-called historical reality, the two are situated in a lecture setting at a level superior to the story of the two days preceding the talk.

Following the shift and the questions of the narrator's identity, a new question follows regarding the quantity of narrators. If the narrator in the beginning of the essay is Woolf or a fictive speaker, while the narrator of the story preceding the lecture is not, these must necessarily be conceived of as two narrators. Or perhaps, because they use the same pronoun, it is easier to perceive them as two *voices*, differenced by time and space, or even realm or storyworld. The situation is made even more intricate by the fact that the narrator invites the reader to call her by whatever name he or she pleases, and her suggestion of the three names, Mary Beton, Mary Seton, or Mary Carmichael. These are all characters that are active in the story, a feature which further complicates an establishment of the quantity of narrators and their voices. Their voices are in many ways always filtering through because the narrator has made their presence explicit by naming them in relation to the 'I' in the beginning. Regardless of textual or narrative cues or rules, the voices of Mary Beton, Mary Seton, and Mary Carmichael are somehow entangled with the narrator's 'I'. Because their names are gathered under the first-person singular 'I', this 'I' necessarily denotes multiple identities, and leads us back to a question about the identity of the narrator. Consequently, questions regarding the narrator are entwined with questions of quantity, identity, and form. And because of the staging of dialogue or conversation such inquiry also involves the reader and the narratee.

3.2.2 Internal Communication and a Multifaceted, Fluctuating, and Fluid Self

In her work on feminist rhetoric, Melba Cuddy-Keane draws our attention how dominant patriarchal discourse – the one Virginia Woolf strives to undermine – limits the potential for active dialogue with the reader and the narrator and the narratee: "[i]n *A Room of One's Own* the authoritative voice of the patriarchal male writer darkens his text with a 'shadow shaped something like the letter 'I'' (150), shutting the reader out and preventing any possibility of active creative dialogue between narrator and narratee" (1996 144). Concurring with this

view, I argue that one of the ways in which Woolf's narrator functions politically is through facilitating an open exchange between agents and removing the shadow of the 'I'. If we consider the intradiegetic level in isolation, the active dialogue Cuddy-Keane speaks of is not only one between speaker and audience. The construct of the audience can still be considered the narratee or the ones that are being addressed but this overshadows the communication going on *within* the story. If we only assume the story to be told to the women in the lecture(s), we might overlook layers and dynamics in the text that are important. If the communication is understood to only occur between the frame and the story, we miss the sense of dialogue going on between agents on the intradiegetic level.

Provided that, as Rimmon-Kenan emphasises, "the narratee is the agent addressed by the narrator" (105), we must look beyond the notion of speaker and audience or reader and writer. *A Room* establishes other settings of conversations and the narrative choices open for different voices and agents at the storylevel. In this regard, Jane Goldman argues that the project of the essay involves a "contestive constellation of subjects addressing each other" (22). As the latter part of this section argues, such a view becomes particularly relevant for the way in which the 'I' can be seen as fragmented and manifold. However, the notion of subjects addressing each other also poses interesting questions as to how voices and opinions besides those of the narrator's 'I' come into play. In this regard, I find Woolf's ability to bring in opposing voices of particular interest.

In fact, through one of the constructions of the narrator and the narratee, Woolf provides a dialogue with patriarchy, its agents and institutions. Such a dialogue surfaces through the narrator's interest in questions and answers, and her problematisation of truth. After her visit to Oxbridge she is befuddled by her experience and goes to the British Museum for answers: "[b]ut one needed answers, not questions; and an answer was only to be had by consulting the learned and the unprejudiced" (27). The word 'consulting' presupposes and initiates some kind of communication and 'the learned' refers to traditional masculine knowledge. Similarly, the word 'enquiry' in the following uttering also signifies a transaction of ideas or information: "[t]hus provided, thus confident and enquiring, I set out in the pursuit of truth" (27). Accordingly, when she asks the following questions, the male academe is in part the narratee or the ones addressed: "[w]hy did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? What effect has poverty on fiction? What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art?" (27). This interpretation is strengthened when the narrator later thinks about what she has found: "I had been foolish to ask my professor to furnish me with 'indisputable proofs' of this or that in his argument about

women” (41). The same way in which ‘consult’ and ‘enquire’ portend communication, so too does the word ‘ask’. Although the narrator concludes that her enquiry has not been very fruitful, she has nevertheless opened a conversation with men which continues into the next chapter when she suggests “to narrow the enquiry and to ask the historian” (43).

From this perspective, the various scholars and authors the narrator consults become an addressee or recipient of her questions. In many ways, the “[p]rofessors, schoolmasters, sociologists, clergymen, novelists, essayists, [and] journalists” (30) all become characters that function as the narrator’s narratee. From another perspective, the notion of a conversation with patriarchy is also a general one. The celebrators and institutions of patriarchy are contained within the presentation of one particular professor. Through the image of Professor von X “writing his monumental work entitled *The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*” (32), Woolf engages in an exchange of ideas with patriarchy. The narrator comments explicitly on her use of this generalisation when concluding that the professors were angry. As she puts it, she has “lumped them together thus” (34). By using the professor(s) and his knowledge as the epitome for patriarchy, Woolf is able to address patriarchy without addressing men directly. This can be seen as a strategic move and to illustrate Michèle Barrett’s point about *A Room* being “calculated to be attractive to men” (351). The notion of an indirect critique can be read as a means to approach a highly controversial subject in calm manners. As Cuddy-Keane notes, “although Woolf was adept at direct sarcasm, in her published work and particularly in her essays, she usually handled opposition in a more subtle way” (2003 75).

Two potential charges are discernible from this view of the narrator’s communication with patriarchy. For one, she can be seen as not being direct and to address and criticise patriarchy in a concealed and subtle manner. The other charge is closely related. Because such critique and questions are posed in a subtle manner it limits the possibility for actual answers. More importantly, because what appears as one narrator is in control of the narrative, Woolf can avoid rendering overt communication between other characters and agents. The first-person narrator provides narrative authority, suggesting the possibility of posing questions without giving space for answers or to provide answers in the voice of the ‘I’. The use of what appears as one monumental and subjective voice, can be an effective instrument in rephrasing, retelling, or even twisting and distorting original statements and viewpoints. The authority of the ‘I’ run the risk of being as limiting as the patriarchal ‘I’ Woolf is trying to avoid and undermine.

Woolf and her narrator, however, do allow for answers. In fact, even though the narrator paraphrases and reworks some of the research she consults, there are nevertheless a great amount of citations or quotations that are presented in the many voices of patriarchy. The narrator steps aside and let men speak for themselves. Samuel Butler, Alexander Pope, La Bruyère, Dr Johnson (albeit in the voice of Boswell), James George Frazer, Desmond MacCarthy, Frank Laurence Lucas, George Macaulay Trevelyan, and John Middleton Murry, to mention but a few, are all quoted in their own words and voices. Adhering to formal requirements for distinguishing quotations or direct speech, their voices are woven into the text. Their conflicting opinions on women are recorded either in the immediate text or in the footnotes provided by Woolf. Because the narrator's research happens on the intradiegetic level, they are brought into the story, come alive, hold their opinions, counter each other, and answer the questions the narrator asks. In many ways, then, Woolf's narrator does not only go into conversation with these men, she also stages a setting for conversation where the great men of the age talk with each other. She does not seek to overshadow their statements with her 'I', but lets them speak for themselves.⁶ Additionally, instead of maintaining her authoritative position, the narrator changes her own point of view and positions herself as a recipient, narratee, or reader of these critics.

Despite critics' observations that *A Room* provides a subtle critique and indirect indignation, there are places where the narrator is very straightforward. This becomes apparent at the point in the story where the Beadle joins in as one of the narratees on the intradiegetic level: "I refuse to allow you, Beadle though you are, to turn me off the grass. Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt, that you can set upon the freedom of my mind" (76). In this statement or exclamation the image of the Beadle provides a link to patriarchy, quite similar to that of Professor von X. Accordingly, when patriarchy in the shape of the Beadle is understood as one of the narrator's addressees, the utterance cannot be disregarded or yield to common assumptions about Woolf's subtlety. As such, the comment must be seen as part of the narrator's conversation or dialogue with patriarchy. Consequently, it partially discharges comments about the charm and evasiveness Woolf employs in *A Room*.

The notion of narratees on the intradiegetic level can be used as a further means into the layered dialogue in *A Room*. Returning to the narrator's questions, these are not only

⁶ This view suggests that the inclusion of the dominant discourses have more than one function. Although Woolf plays with their convention, as I discussed in chapter two, her inclusion of these voices should also be seen in light of a democratic tendency.

addressed to ‘the learned’ and the narrator does not only address male characters directly or indirectly. On several occasions, the narrator asks herself questions. As readers we witness the way in which her research comes about. The questions the narrator asks herself fuel her thought and send it off in new directions: “[b]ut what was lacking, what was different, I asked myself, listening to the talk?” (13). In this sense, we are witness to the *process* of thinking, so particular for the essay genre. Similarly, thinking about the tension between truth and illusion the narrator asks herself: “indeed, which was truth and which was illusion? I asked myself” (17). The narrator’s conversation with herself becomes exemplary for the narrator’s story and for the essay genre as means of thinking on paper: “[b]ut why, I asked myself, having returned the books, Why, I repeated, standing under the colonnade among the pigeons and the prehistoric canoes, why are they angry? And, asking myself this question, I strolled off to find a place for luncheon” (34). In all of these utterances the narrator is herself the agent she addresses and thus also a narratee to parts of her own narration. Thus, the notion of questions and answers does not only allow for a conversation between the men. It opens a double-layered discourse whereby the narrator engages in a discussion with herself as well as the many male voices.

The notion of the narration as an intersubjective dialogue of the self can be extended through Leila Brosnan’s argument that the ‘I’ “is internally dialogised as the four Maries” (137). In light of this, questions posed to the different ‘Maries’ are also used to set conversation in motion. The narrator particularly interacts with Mary Seton and Mary Carmichael. The former becomes the narratee during their talk after dinner at Fernham: “[o]nly, if Mrs Seton and her like had gone into business at the age of fifteen, there would have been — that was the snag in the argument — no Mary. What, I asked, did Mary think of that? (23). Several times she addresses Mary Carmichael, the fictive author of *Life’s Adventures*: “[b]ut why, I asked her as if she were present, are Jane Austen’s sentences not of the right shape for you?” (80). Carmichael thus becomes an important recipient of questions regarding women and writing: “[a]ll these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded, I said, addressing Mary Carmichael as if she were present; [...]” and “[a]ll that you will have to explore, I said to Mary Carmichael, holding your torch firm in your hand” (89). Regarding Mary Seton and Mary Carmichael as a narratee lets us consider the form or the generic terms of the text more specifically. Because these names are names the narrator suggests for herself, one way to interpret her addressing Mary Seton and Mary Carmichael is that she addresses herself. Because of this, Harvena Richter suggests calling them “sibling selves” (136). Because the Maries are gathered under the first-person pronoun the narrator employs, it does

not only highlight the dialogical aspect of the essay, but more specifically illustrates the essayist addressing herself using various constellations of her own 'I'. Although essay theory recognises this as a typical essayistic trait, Woolf subverts the boundaries of the essayist's 'I' by giving it different names and referring to these using the third-person pronoun.

In many ways, then, *A Room* is a conversation between sibling selves. First, this is significant in relation to Woolf's understanding of the dynamic and fragmented self. Both in her personal writings and her many publications, the problem of representing the self was an important and ever returning question. It often appears in her diary and novels such as *Orlando* and *The Waves* problematise the self both through the structure and content. My analysis of the narrator's conversation with herself shows the way in which such different variations of the self come about through questions and the process of thinking. The various means of addressing oneself is emphasised by the narrator's many names. This feature points to the presence of the various selves that may be contained within one individual. It also creates space for a manifold and even female subjectivity. Here, the fluidity of the narrator's identity illustrates Woolf's ability to dismantle the notion of the self as a static entity. In *A Room* the self or the 'I' is not at all static, or contained within one character or person. Thus, the preceding analysis adds to Toril Moi's stance that 'I's "radically undermine the unitary self, the central concept of Western male humanism" (7).

Second, the notion of the self can be connected with the essay form. According to Graham Good, as presented in the introductory chapter, the essayist's 'I' is conceived as the structuring force of the essay, providing the continuities that hold it together. A fragmented and indefinable 'I' thus suggests a reworking of generic terms, undermining the structuring abilities assigned to the essayist's self. The fragmented 'I', however, can also be argued to mirror the fragmented nature of the essay form. As Brosnan puts it, "portraying the subject of the essay as multiple, shifting and diverse, functions as a means of reflectively creating the essayist as various and manifold" (145). Thus the 'I' Woolf employs in *A Room* both adheres to and violates generic conventions and expectations. Furthermore, provided that the 'I' has a political function, she can also be understood as governed by what Theodor W. Adorno refers to as the 'idea'. This notion illustrates the double connection of form and content.

Third, however, one should not overlook the fact that *A Room* does make use of the first-person singular. As already mentioned, this provides the appearance of one narrator and one voice. Because the many subjects come into being through the narrator's 'I', it can also be related to the politics of the text as it suggests the presence of a collective or unified voice of women. This becomes particularly relevant for the material aspect of the argument: "[i]f Mrs

Seton, I said, had been making money, what sort of memories would you have had of games and quarrels? What would you have known of Scotland, and its fine air and cakes and all the rest of it? But it is useless to ask these questions, because you would never have come into existence at all” (24). Here, the narratee is Mary Seton, but it can also be women in general. As such Mrs Seton becomes the epitome of mother, providing a general understanding and construction of ‘you’. As such, women of the past, present, and the future can be read into the question because they are all affected. *A Room*, however, is told with an ‘I’ and not the collective ‘we’. Both Gillian Beer and Maria DiBattista bring attention to Woolf’s awareness of problems associated with the pronoun ‘we’, as it invites the individual to join only to make it vanish in the unity. Thus, the notion of a female unity can only partly be relevant. Rather, by employing the multiple ‘I’ and thus deconstructing it, Woolf enacts many female subjectivities and refuses any generalised or collective definition of women. As DiBattista further notes, Woolf did employ variations of the pronoun ‘we’, but she also knew that the “nominative ‘I’ was as elastic [...] a pronoun as ‘we’” (79).

3.2.3 Dialogue Across Common Boundaries: Fluctuating Positions

The elasticity of the narrator’s ‘I’ can be further elaborated on when seen in light of the layered narrative which Beth Rigel Daughterly considers so important for the feminist persuasion in *A Room of One’s Own*. In fact, my recent discussion only highlights part of the narrator’s plasticity and she can be further problematised using the concept of narrative levels. The internal communication outlined in the preceding section does not pay attention to places where the narrator moves to another level. Inside the text and even within her own story, she does not only address agent on the same level and there are numerous constructions of an ambiguous ‘you’. The ‘I’ also fluctuates between different levels as yet another means for destabilising her identity and multiplicity even further. With acute attention to details, the dynamics of the storytelling is reflected in her movement between levels. My argument is that such movement deconstructs the boundaries usually associated with layered narratives. This feature of the essay connects the narrative form precisely with the politics of the text.

One illustrative example is found when the narrator is explaining her own research on women and poverty. First, the narrator narrates in the past tense, referring to all the questions emerging from her initial inquiry of why women were, and generally still are, poor. She ends these thoughts with the comment that “[e]very page in my notebook was scribbled over with notes” (30). After this, however, the tense changes: “[t]o show the state of mind I was in, I will read you a few of them, explaining that the page was headed quite simply, WOMEN

AND POVERTY, in block letters; but what followed was something like this:" (30). Here, a transition between the two narrative levels is discernible. In the first comment, the narrator is telling her story to a covert narratee, while the second quotation is addressed to an audience. The difference between the two examples is not only marked by their tense, but also by the sense of immediacy in the second one: the narrator appears to be taking her sheet from the lecture stand, showing the women in the audience how her notes looked. This illuminates how the action is moved out of the storyworld and back to the lecture again. The way the text continues after this demonstration of the sheet, however, suggests that the movement between the levels is not over: "[h]ere I drew breath and added, indeed, in the margin, Why does Samuel Butler say, 'Wise men never say what they think of women'?" (31). The narrator narrates her actions in the past tense again, and the reader is brought back to the story, or the intradiegetic level.

Further into the story and text, the famous example about Olivia liking Chloe from Mary Carmichael's book *Life's Adventures* can be used to illustrate another transition:

And, determined to do my duty by her as reader if she would do her duty by me as writer, I turned the page and read . . . I am sorry to break off so abruptly. Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Charles Biron is not concealed? We are all women you assure me? Then I may tell you that the very next words I read were these—"Chloe liked Olivia . . ." Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women. (81)

Again, the tense can be used as a starting point. The beginning of this passage is narrated in the past tense referring to what the narrator *was* doing. Immediately after this, however, she *is* breaking of 'so abruptly', addressing someone about the content of the book in the present tense. Further, due to her deictic references to a specific curtain and figure,⁷ seemingly perceptible to the ones she is addressing, it is likely that she is addressing the women in the lecture. This view is strengthened by the fact that her questions could easily have been put in quotation marks, marked as direct speech, and by the sense of action going on in between these lines. The narrator's questions anticipate answers which are omitted, and her demand that the addressee should not blush, appears as an answer to the narratee's unrecorded reaction. Accordingly, the first part of the passage represents the actions of the intradiegetic narrator presented in her voice, whereas the latter part is uttered by the extradiegetic speaker.

Because of the distinctiveness of the 'I' on the extradiegetic level and the 'I' on the intradiegetic level, this cannot merely be understood as the same narrator differentiated in

⁷ This figure refers to Sir Charles Biron and the trial on *The Well of Loneliness*, and adds to the distinction between the intradiegetic storyworld and the extradiegetic setting of the lecture or talk. More particularly, however, it points to the tension between fiction and reality which will be treated in chapter four.

terms of space and time. The narrator provides comments about their individualised properties when situating the one as a speaker and the other as a fictive entity whose name “is not a matter of any importance” (6). Thus, there are important distinctions between the two and they must in many ways be understood as two separate narrators and voices. Yet they are also linked together because of their first-person pronoun and thus perceived of as the same. Accordingly, shifts or movement between narrative levels illustrate another way in which Woolf breaks up the singularity of the first-person pronoun singular. Furthermore, the transitions also break conventions associated both with the essayist and the first-person narrator of fiction. Because she negates her own identity, the ‘I’ cannot be conflated with the identity of the essayist. Yet because she can be associated with the author of the text, she does not appear as a conventional first-person narrator.

There is one particular transition that suggests that the narrator at one point is Woolf. The closing of the essay is another example of how the narrator and the narrative fluctuate between the different levels and the narrator comments explicitly on her personae and voice:

Here, then, Mary Beton ceases to speak. She has told you how she reached the conclusion—the prosaic conclusion—that it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry. [...] And I will end now in my own person by anticipating two criticisms, so obvious that you can hardly fail to make them. (103-104)

Because this quotation asserts that ‘Mary Beton ceases to speak’,⁸ the narrative moves out of the intradiegetic story and the voice of the ‘I’ must now be the extradiegetic one. Thus, the narrative is situated on the extradiegetic level, as is the narratee. The application of the personal pronoun ‘you’ is another feature of this ending, making it plain that there is an overt narratee. More strikingly, the narrator states that she will end in her own person. This uttering signals the voice of a more stable or steady identity of the narrator who is now speaking. Such a view gains strength when connected with the possibility that the extradiegetic narrator’s ‘I’ is Virginia Woolf herself. When the ‘I’ of an essay claims she will end in her own person, the writer or essayist necessarily comes to mind.

This appears particularly relevant in light of Quentin Bell’s musings on Woolf’s voice and *A Room*: “[f]or in *A Room of One’s Own* one hears Virginia speaking” and in the text “she gets very close to her conversational style” (144). Such a view is also strengthened by the fact that the narrator now refers to “Cambridge” (104) and not the fictional ‘Oxbridge’. The signifying of a real place emphasises the connections between Woolf and the

⁸ This is the phrase that leads many critics to conflate Woolf’s speaker with the voice of Mary Beton. Such a partial reduction is for instance apparent in works of Jane Goldman, Anka Ryall, and Elaine Showalter. Because most critics probably refer to Mary Beton’s voice for brevity, I do not wish to use this as an argument to show how my analysis shows more voices and contradicts established scholars. Nevertheless, it is worth noting.

extradiegetic speaker as well as the links between Woolf's contemporaneity. Evoking Cambridge in many ways freezes the spatial dimension and Woolf's original lectures come to mind again. By extension, the ending of her talk also refers to a specific temporal moment. Addressing the audience about events that have changed the situation for women, she concludes, "[o]therwise you would not be here *tonight*" (106, my emphasis). This indicates a narratee or an audience which is situated in both space and time. In this sense, the ending can be understood as Woolf speaking to the women in the lecture, personified by E. E. Phare and U. K. N. Carter. Thus, despite critics' claims and Woolf's insistence that she kept her figure fictitious, the narrator's 'I' and her voice must be partly understood as Woolf's own.

Furthermore, there are other more subtle and unconventional nuances. In relation to the narrator's storytelling, it is possible to distinguish yet another narrative layer, the meta- or hypodiegetic level. As presented in my first chapter, these are instances where a story is told within the narrator's story. In this regard, there are two instances which stand out. The narrator's conversation with Mary Seton and the excerpt from *Jane Eyre* both illustrate places in the text where the authority of the 'I' is moved or shifted. When the narrator meets with Mary Seton after their dinner at Fernham, and they have their discussion about the founding of the college, one such story comes about:

Well, said Mary Seton, about the year 1860 – Oh, but you know the story, she said, bored, I suppose, by the recital. And she told me – rooms were hired. Committees met. Envelopes were addressed. Circulars were drawn up. Meetings were held; letters were read out; so–and–so has promised so much; on the contrary, Mr — won't give a penny. The *Saturday Review* has been very rude. How can we raise a fund to pay for offices? Shall we hold a bazaar? Can't we find a pretty girl to sit in the front row? Let us look up what John Stuart Mill said on the subject. Can anyone persuade the editor of the — to print a letter? Can we get Lady — to sign it? Lady — is out of town. That was the way it was done, presumably, sixty years ago, and it was a prodigious effort, and a great deal of time was spent on it. And it was only after a long struggle and with the utmost difficulty that they got thirty thousand pounds together. * So obviously we cannot have wine and partridges and servants carrying tin dishes on their heads, she said. We cannot have sofas and separate rooms. 'The amenities,' she said, quoting from some book or other, 'will have to wait.' (21-22)

The intradiegetic narrator is very much present here, but the concrete voice of Mary Seton is filtering through. In the beginning of this passage, the narrator only recounts what Mary Seton did tell her, using the textual marker 'she said'. The text succeeding this phrase, however, has no such markers and appears to be taken directly from a story that is being told. This aspect, together with the fact that Mary Seton is one of the names the narrator suggests for herself, lead us to consider this story as embedded in the main story and as told by Mary Seton. Therefore, the example can be understood as a transition from the intradiegetic narrator to that of a hypodiegetic one. When the passage is construed thus, Mary Seton is a homodiegetic narrator on the hypodiegetic level, and the intradiegetic 'I' is the hypodiegetic narratee

receiving Mary Seton's story.⁹ Accordingly, yet another nuance of the narrator's 'I' can be distinguished.

In *A Room*, Woolf also provides what is tempting to label an example of the quite contradictory concept of a heterodiegetic first-person narrator on the hypodiegetic level:

[T]hen I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character than was here within my reach. I valued what was good in Mrs Fairfax, and what was good in Adele; but I believed in the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness, and what I believed in I wished to behold.

Who blames me? Many, no doubt, and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. . . . (69)

Most critics have used this passage either to criticise Woolf's argument about anger, personality, and writing, or to shed light on the notion of a canon of female writers and women writers thinking back through their mothers. The fact that this excerpt is from another first-person narrative is often overlooked. Because Jane Eyre is not a character in the main story, she must be labelled a heterodiegetic narrator, and because her story can be seen as a new story embedded (at least inserted) in the main story, she is a hypodiegetic narrator. Despite the fact that she is a completely different narrator with a more specified identity than that of Woolf's narrator, Jane Eyre must nevertheless be connected with the narrator's 'I' because of the first-person pronoun. At the same time, the original 'I' also position herself as reader of Charlotte Brontë's text. This is significant because it illustrates Woolf's ability to violate common conventions. More importantly, Jane Eyre's voice adds yet another layer both to the narrative and to my discussion of the multiple 'I'.

To summarise, the various 'I's can be positioned according to which level they appear on. On the extradiegetic level, we find the narrator located in the frame of the narrative, in the 'lecture'. Next, we encounter the intradiegetic narrator, which after the speaker's 'introduction', initiates a shift. Within this level, the narrator addresses narratees on the same level such as the Beadle and Mary Carmichael. In one variation of the 'I', the narrator appears as Mary Seton a hypodiegetic narrator. More strikingly, Jane Eyre's voice is included inside the narrator's story. This outline shows ways in which we can interpret the narrator's 'I' and her movement between different spheres. The fact that Woolf refuses to include clear means to differentiate the 'I's and their voices, emphasises her reluctance to give prominence to one speaker and one opinion. Narrative levels are typically presented hierarchical, but the fluctuation of the 'I's and their movement render them impossible to pin down in absolute

⁹ Of course, because Mary Seton is one of the names linked to the narrator's 'I', we can never be sure about the distinctions between the two, as would necessarily be the case in the classic example of a hypodiegetic narrator.

categories. In my analysis, Woolf exploits the inherent possibilities in a layered narrative and undermines what can be linked to hierarchal power structures. Because the communication between these agents happens across common boundaries, the democratic facet of the text is brought to the fore. Furthermore, despite the fact that it is possible to present the variations in a systemised manner, there are no clear or unambiguous cues which let us disentangle these 'I's completely from each other. This is also reflected in the construction of a 'you'. Although we can understand the narratee to be the many 'Maries', the Beadle and patriarchy, or the audience, it is not possible to separate the construction of a recipient from the reader.

3.2.4 The Narrator and her Reader: Manipulation, Consideration, and Argument

As I related in my introductory chapter and as indicated in the preceding analysis, I think the reader in one sense or another has to be taken into account as a kind of narratee. The reader is, after all, the last instance in the chain of communication. Even if we consider the text in terms of a speaker and an audience, or as a fictional text with a storyworld with characters communicating in some sense or another, the reader is nevertheless the agent for whom the text is intended. In this sense, all my preceding findings also concern the narrator's effect on the reader. Accordingly, I should like to move the focus to the ways in which the narrator includes and involves the reader. She does not only include the reader, however, she also affects the reader's interaction with the story, message, and ideas presented in *A Room of One's Own*. I argue that the narrator provides autonomy to the reader but that she also guides the reader's cognition and provides a smooth mediation of the message.

There are various places in the text where we may be led to think that the audience is being addressed, where it could actually be the reader. There are, in fact, many passages that illuminate the ambiguity between the speaker and her audience and the writer and her reader. One such example is found when the narrator is on her way from Oxbridge to Fernham: "I spare you the twists and turns of my cogitations, for no conclusion was found on the road to Headingley, and I ask you to suppose that I soon found out my mistake about the turning and retraced my steps to Fernham" (17). Here, one might easily visualise the speaker relating her story, but because of the reliance on textuality and because of the various distinctions between the narrator and her narratees, the reader also comes to mind. In the light of this, her asking the reader suggests that she invites the reader to be active in the text. Similarly, the beginning of chapter two may also be seen as an invitation to the reader's imagination: "[t]he scene, if I may ask you to follow me, was now changed. [and] I must ask you to imagine a room" (27). This invitation can be seen as an interaction between the narrator and the reader where the

latter provides her or his imaginative abilities. The notion of addressing the reader directly, suggests that the various constructions of a 'you' also portend the reader as narratee.

There are a myriad of places where the narrator addresses someone directly. The following example, however, stands out because it allows us to see it as a comment on the text and the story as a whole. After 'Mary Beton ceases to speak', the narrator summarises her story and address an equally ambiguous 'you':

She has asked you to follow her flying into the arms of a Beadle, lunching here, dining there, drawing pictures in the British Museum, taking books from the shelf, looking out of the window. While she has been doing all these things, you no doubt have been observing her failings and foibles and deciding what effect they have had on her opinions. You have been contradicting her and making whatever additions and deductions seem good to you. That is all as it should be, for in a question like this truth is only to be had by laying together many varieties of error. (103)

In this passage, the audience can very well be the ones that are being addressed. By contrast or extension, however, this 'you' can also be the reader. When perceived of as the reader, the passage can be read retrospectively. In this sense, the duality of the narrator as speaker and as writer comes to the surface. If she is understood to address the reader, this passage must be seen as a comment on the reading process. By underscoring the reader's entitlement to contradict and add to the story, she signifies the text as a 'coproduction' between reader and writer. This view both echoes John Snyder's comment that the essay constitutes itself the process of being read and alludes to the general foundations of reception studies. Also, by referring to what the reader might have been doing 'while' the narrator has been experiencing these major events, she comments upon reading time and the cognition of the reader. It is suggestive of the many actions taking place within the mind while reading. This passage provides the reader with autonomy and the narrator signals how he or she is trusted to make her or his own choices. Or as Woolf herself relates it in "How Should One Read a Book?", "[w]hen we want to decide a particular case, we can best help ourselves" (397). Furthermore, this interaction between reader and writer adds another layer to how the dialogical principle is at work in the communication between agents situated outside the text. As Melba Cuddy-Keane puts it, Woolf uses it to write "in a way that leaves room for her own reader's intervention and response" (2003 133).

But despite the fact that the reader is invited into the text, the choice of a first-person narrator does restrict the reader's access to information. In fact, in many ways the narrator controls the narrative and relies on her narrative authority. As presented in my theoretical framework, the application of a first-person narrator has importance for the notion of focalisation or perspective. Recalling Jakob Lothe, the term perspective relates not only to a narrator's point of orientation, but also to its psychological and ideological background. In a

first-person narrative, the perspective is limited to that of the narrator. Thus, in *A Room* the narrator uses her perception of the world to present the image of the banks of the river, the British Museum, and the couple getting into the taxicab. In this kind of narration, the reader is prompted to rely on the vision of the world as it is presented by the narrator. Thus, on the level of the surface, the reader is not met with opposing or conflicting views and he or she needs only to keep track of the narrator's considerations of the surroundings. Accordingly, elements that are presented in the essay might be easier to grasp and more easily accepted. This has importance for general aspects of the narrator's story. One must for instance believe that the food at the Oxbridge luncheon is better than the dinner at Fernham, and accept that *Life's Adventures* by Mary Carmichael is an OK book but would be better "in another hundred years' of time" (92). From this perspective, the narrator functions to govern and guide the reader's cognition, providing a reading without contrastive elements.

The crucial point, however, is the fact that the essay conveys the political message or argument, "that it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry" (103). The communication of this message and the claims related to it, must necessarily involve some kind of persuasion. Recalling Carl Klaus, the persuasive nature of the essay suggests that it is always concerned with convincing the reader of what it represents. When the reader only shares the perspective of one character the mediation of such a message might be easier. Because both the story and the argument are filtered through one perspective, Woolf can avoid disturbing elements such as differing conceptions of the world. Due to the sense of stability that is communicated through a first-person narrator, it can be argued that the message in *A Room* gets more fluently through to the reader. Accordingly, the choice of a first-person narrator can be thought of as a rhetorical strategy aimed at persuading the reader.

Yet the key in the preceding paragraph must necessarily be that this is how it *appears* on the surface level and how the first-person narrator *functions*. Indeed, the same manner in which the storyline exists as something solid the reader can rely on, so too does the narrator function as a seemingly stable and perceptible entity. But as I concluded in chapter two, providing stability is but one aspect of the narrative dimension: the main storyline acts like a narrative illusion which is repeatedly disturbed and interrupted. In the same manner, the narrator appears as a traditional narrator with one voice and one perspective, but she is frequently accompanied by her sibling selves and other voices. The preceding findings about why it is difficult to link the narrator to one character and one voice have consequences for how we think of perspective. It is fairly easy (and quite common in traditional narratives) to

picture a scene where the perspective changes without the voice changing. In the case of *A Room*, however, it seems to be the other way around. If the voice changes, must this not necessarily entail some perspectival shift? There are no direct cues as to a drastic change in the narrator's perspective. But when she positions herself differently, employs various voices, and split the self into various personae, she must necessarily view the world differently from these diverging positions?¹⁰

At any rate, the narrator's ambiguous use of voice does suggest an equally ambiguous use of perspective. Judith Allen connects the notion of voice and perspective and underscores that the text in *A Room*, amongst other essays, "enact[s] an intricate dialogic involving a multitude of voices that enable Woolf's narrators – in their interactions with these voices – to display many contradictory perspectives" (88). On the one hand, the effect of perspective upon the reader can be understood as one of stability. But it can be equally argued that the different positioning of the narrator provides multiple perspectives which are more common for third-person narratives. Following this, it might be difficult to talk of the perspective applied in *A Room* as a typical restricted perspective. Even if the story is narrated by a first-person singular, she positions herself in a myriad of positions and includes contradictory views and other voices, thus sharing her narrative authority.

Despite this unconventional use and variant of the first-person narrator, her voice(s), and perspective(s), there are other aspects to take into consideration. As I also emphasised in my background chapter, questions of reliability often become pressing when dealing with a first-person narrator. Due to the perspectival restrictions in first-person narratives, we must partly understand the narrative as subjectively composed by the 'I'. Albeit the existence of other agents, our narrator is in many ways perceived as one and she does make use of some narrative authority. This comes to surface at places where she comments on her own reactions to aspects in the story she narrates. For instance, on her way home after her first day of research in the British Museum, the narrator notes the domesticity of her little street and refers to the sights of the house painter, the nursemaid, the coal-heaver, and the greengrocer's shop. However, as she tells us, she cannot perceive these common sights without thinking of which of the employments are the higher or more necessary: "so engrossed was I with the problem you have laid upon my shoulders that I could not see even these usual sights without referring

¹⁰ This question makes it tempting to discuss the use of narrative theory on a text which is clearly an essay. Although it allows me to approach various questions regarding the narrator's 'I's, traditional narratology does not provide me with any definite answers as to how to explain the variation in voice and perspective when the nuances of the narrator come about more subtly. To my mind, this ambiguity both reflects Woolf's incredible ability to play with conventions as well as a need for theory to be adapted to its particular use. Also, it could prove a valid investigation of how texts affect the theories we approach them with.

them to one centre” (41). Such comments do not necessarily communicate unreliability. Nonetheless, the reader’s attention is directed to the relationship between the story and the storytelling. By commenting on what she ‘could *not*’ perceive, the narrator discloses that she has composed the narrative after the happening of the events.¹¹ This can generate questions as to what she chooses to include and what she chooses to leave out.

Such questions become important when considering the truthfulness of a narrator’s representation. Whether the narrator’s view of narrated events is honest is decisive when the reader has no choice but to rely on the narrator’s account of the circumstances. Using Rimmon-Kenan’s continuation of Wayne Booth in my introductory chapter, I established limited knowledge, personal involvement, and a problematic value-scheme as the main sources of unreliability. With this in mind, the narrator of *A Room* almost appears as the very epitome of the unreliable narrator. For one, she constantly refers to her limited knowledge and even uses quotations from academic work or contemporary debate to acknowledge “the limitations of [her] sex” (75). She is personally involved and confesses from the very beginning that it is *her* opinion we are told. Even a problematic value-scheme can be assigned to her. If we see the work as a whole in light of the patriarchal society Woolf depicts, the narrator’s representation of her subject matter is in conflict with reigning norms and values. As the narrator puts it, “it is the masculine values that prevail” even though “the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex” (74). On a thematic level, then, Woolf utilises patriarchal norms to display the unreliability of the narrator. Yet as readers we tend to trust her. This, I would argue, has to do with the fact that she admits, so to speak, to what the patriarch would call her ‘shortcomings’. Elements that might have a disturbing effect are thus removed. By highlighting that these impediments are present she discharges them as obstacles. In this sense, Woolf’s narrator turns the concept of the unreliable narrator upside down. By communicating her inability to render the argument and her story unbiased and impartial, the reader is allowed or even led to regard her as reliable and honest. More importantly, by positioning her narrator in opposition to patriarchy but still getting the reader to trust her, Woolf uses the reader to undermine the dominant norms in a world which insists “upon the mental, moral, and physical inferiority of women” (*AROO* 30).

These findings add to my stance that the narrator is possessed of both a communicational and a political function and dimension. On the one hand, by making sure

¹¹ Additionally this observation adds to the discussion of the narrator’s many selves. Here, the narrator recalls her earlier self and comments on how she responded to her surroundings. In many ways, then, *A Room* provides a tension and a negotiation between what narrative theory refers to as the ‘experiencing I’ and the ‘narrating I’.

her audience trusts her, the argument or message is much easier mediated. Because it is easier to persuade a trustful audience, her means of getting the reader to trust her are directly tied in with the communication of the message and the mediation going throughout the text. This is, perhaps, particularly relevant in relation to Woolf's contemporary male readers. The narrator's means of getting the reader to trust her, can be understood in light of what Alex Zwerdeling labels Woolf's need to "conciliate the male audience she could never entirely ignore" (243) On the other hand, however, she also undermines her own narrative authority. By manifesting her unreliability, she gives the reader the opportunity to intervene and decide for her- or himself. The same way in which the multiplicity of agents, voices, and perspectives dismantle and undermine authoritative patriarchal discourse, so too does the narrator's 'unreliability' give the reader an encouragement to think critically and regard dominant values from a new perspective. Furthermore, because the narrator says that she has no true answers about women and fiction, she can yet again be seen to invite the reader's participation. This adds to the democratic facet of the text and the reader's independent opinion. As Woolf puts it herself in one of the essays on reading, "[r]eading is not merely sympathising and understanding; it is also criticising and judging" (*E* 4 396).

In *A Room*, the narrator does not only call attention to events in the story, she equally provides questions and comments regarding textuality and genre. A concept related to unreliability is the perceptibility of the narrator. Of course, because our narrator is a first-person narrator, she is directly present and visible in the text. As opposed to the narrator of *To the Lighthouse*, for instance, the narrator of *A Room* is both overt and linked to something resembling a character or person. Many of the parameters for distinguishing perceptibility are thus redundant. As I have argued already, however, there are places in the text where a tension between the story and the storytelling emerges. This happens when the narrator directs attention to what Rimmon-Kenan calls commentary on "problems of representing [the story]" (100). Rather than upholding the narrative illusion, such comments highlight the devices applied when telling the story. Her comments on the convenient uses of 'I' and the 'licenses of the novelist' are two ways of forcing the reader to reflect upon aspects of representation, genre, and textuality.

More specifically, the narrator both adds comments on textual elements, on fictionality, and provides extratextual comments in terms of footnotes. A striking comment on textuality is found when the narrator is on her way to Fernham: "For truth . . . those dots mark the spot where, in search of truth" (17). Similarly, she describes the procedure of getting the books in the British Museum: "[o]ne went to the counter; one took a slip of paper; one opened

a volume of the catalogue and those five dots here indicate five separate minutes of stupefaction, wonder, and bewilderment” (28). By commenting on the textual markings in the actual physical text, the narrator reveals the text’s artificiality and creates a rupture in the narrative illusion. Indeed, she purposefully directs attention to her knowledge of how the physical text appears to the reader. Later, the narrator relies on textuality when she tells us that “the page was headed quite simply, WOMEN AND POVERTY, in block letters; but what followed was something like this:” (30). After this, the various subheadings for the narrator’s research on the topic are included. As I mentioned in my previous chapter, the entries appears in a linear and orderly fashion as one might find them in a theoretical book. In this new context, however, the presentation in the text might be exactly how it looked on the narrator’s sheet. Accordingly, both the block letters and the list may be seen as a comment on the problematic notion of representing the real or solid in a medium dependent on text. Likewise, the narrator’s own comments on her use of fiction prevent the reader from accepting her representation as a monumental truth. As she puts it, “[f]iction here is likely to contain more truth than fact” (6). This way of commenting on the narrative discourse is a constant reminder for the reader that he or she is reading something with traces of fiction and it should not be accepted unconditionally.

These findings underscore the self-reflexivity of the text and “emphasize the status of the text as artifice, provoking reflections about fictionality and textuality which are typical of self-conscious narratives.” (Rimmon-Kenan 101). This is also an important function of extratextual elements in *A Room*. As the preceding discussion has shown, footnotes have been important both in this and my previous chapter. When considering how footnotes affect the reader, Rimmon-Kenan holds that these too highlight the fictionality of a text. Because her book deals with narrative fiction, however, footnotes might have a slightly different function in the text at hand. Whereas in fictional narratives a footnote “draws attention to the presence of a narrator” (101), footnotes in *A Room* actually draw attention to the presence of other voices. As I discussed in 2.2.2 and 3.2.2, footnotes are included to provide additional or complementary information, suggestions for further reading, or views that contradict the narrator’s opinions. This likens the text to academic discourse or expository prose. In this sense, the footnotes in *A Room* direct the reader’s attention away from the story and its notion of fiction. As shown in chapter two, while reading, the reader almost settles in the narrative illusion but is always prevented due to contradictions or interruptions in the text. Similarly, the reader is almost led to believe that he or she is reading fiction but the presence of footnotes brings the text’s status as nonfiction to the foreground. The references within the

fictional story remind the reader that he or she is reading an essay. In other words, by providing commentaries and footnotes, the narrator challenges the reader and emphasises that *A Room* – like so many other of Woolf's texts – is a generic fusion.

3.3 The Narrator – Dispersed Subjectivity

I began my analysis by entering the text with the concept of an audience. This approach revealed that the notion of an audience cannot be easily disentangled from a general recipient, the narratee, or even the reader. The dialogical process of *A Room* signifies and accentuates all these agents. The construction of a 'you' is rendered as ambiguous as the narrator's 'I'. Furthermore, the notion of questions and answers also establishes a setting for conversation enabling the various agents to communicate. Here, it is not only the narrator's 'I' that contributes. Rather, the narrator's other selves and patriarchal voices become a part of the textual makeup of *A Room* and the reader's cognition is also invited into the text. Because the narrator positions herself as a reader, she is also part of a readership. Thus, communication and dialogue occur not only between agents in the storyworld but also involve communication across boundaries of fiction and narrative levels. In this regard, the way in which the 'I's move and fluctuate between the layers of the narrative deconstructs the boundaries usually associated with layered narratives. Woolf thus dismantles the hierarchal structures, and her refusal to give precedence to one of these voices signifies a rejection of hierarchical power structures. Accordingly, the democratic facet of the text comes about through the sense of dialogue made possible by its textual and narrative composition, which in many ways welcomes opposing views and voices.

Above all, my analysis renders the narrator fluid. The subjectivity of the narrator contributes to the political facet of the text and its generic affiliation. The narrator's subjectivity is dislocated and diffused. Because of the reluctance to take on one stable voice, the subjectivity commonly associated with the first-person pronoun is fragmented and dissolved. This splitting up of the stable self is in direct violation of the expectations for the essay genre and the essayist's 'I'. Particularly, by rendering subjectivity as a fragmented and ambulatory concept, Woolf avoids the shadow of patriarchy which she associates with the first-person singular. Yet the 'I' of *A Room* also serves to unify the textual mosaic of the essay. Similarly, the first-person narrator of a narrative should be commensurable with one character that is active in the story. But Woolf's narrator is multiple and manifold. However, she can also be perceived of as one. If Woolf refuses to stick to one form, structure, or language, she uses so do her employment of the first-person pronoun in a way that shows a

reluctance to let one convention dominate. From this perspective, the 'I' Woolf employs in *A Room* both adheres to and violates generic conventions and expectations: deconstruction of genre becomes part of her political message.

Despite the important connections between the formalities of the text, its structure, textual composition, and politics of *A Room*, the narrator also has a rhetorical and strategic function. This function is reflected in the ways in which the essay is set up to persuade a reader and mediate the argument. The narrator does restrict the reader's access to information and makes use of certain strategies in order to make the reader trust her. However, the fact that what we commonly think of as rhetorical strategies cannot be separated and seen in isolation from the argument and the politics of the text emphasises the complex and compound communicative processes in the essay. Above all, however, the narrator's 'I' is Woolf's most important strategy to avoid using her own voice. While this is partly true, this chapter has argued that Woolf's voice is in the text. Her presence in the text is important for the discussion that unfolds in the following chapter.

4 The Writer: Reality is Fiction – Fiction is Reality

4.1 Unstable Categories – “What is meant by ‘Reality’?”

Despite the chronological treatment of the narrator’s storyline in chapter two and the presentation of narrative levels in the preceding chapter, the narrator’s path and actions in the course of *A Room of One’s Own* cannot be easily defined. Her swerves into imagination, into history, into research and fantasy can hardly be confined in any straightforward manner. As my findings suggest the narrator relates to different and several spheres in the text. Accordingly, the present analysis must further problematise the way in which the narrator and her narrative relate to time and space. This chapter sets out to identify and discuss ways in which fiction, history, and Woolf’s own life are woven into the textual fabric of *A Room* and also how this may be related to the politics of the text. In line with the critical debate, I argue that Woolf sets up a relationship between reality and fiction that violates common understandings of these categories. By doing this, she deconstructs the dominant discourses of historiography and autobiography, gives voice to the silences or absences in history, and gives fiction a function that contributes to the epistemological relativity of the text. Furthermore, my analysis aims to demonstrate the ways in which Woolf can be understood to have written herself into the text. Thus, this chapter is a continuation of strains of my argument in both chapters two and three. Because it draws heavily on my previous analysis and discussion, this chapter will not be as dependent on my theoretical framework.

I thus conduct the present analysis in terms of the various ways the narrator and her material relate to fictional matters, historical subjects, and a possible autobiographical subject. There is the historical reality when Woolf read her papers at Newham and Girton October 1928, which I located as the extradiegetic level of the narrative. Then there is the reality of the fictional narrator, the diegesis or intradiegetic level, which may be considered a fusion of Woolf’s contemporary reality and a fictional universe. However, there are other spaces or spheres which cannot be approached only with the traditional distinctions provided by classical narratology. There is also a fictional space within the narrator’s mind where the reader sometimes is given access to her thoughts. On the one hand, we have seen in the preceding analysis, the story of the narrator is but a construction of her mind, a fiction or a so-called ‘fancy’. On the other hand, and complicating the matter, her story relates to a world outside her mind, where notions of history are brought into question. In one sense, the reader witnesses many of the details he or she can acquire through history books, but in another sense the narrator creates a fictional history. Thus, through her narration which relates both to

fiction and to so-called reality, the distinction between truth and lies, history and fictional history, fiction and reality become blurred.

In *A Room*, the notion of fiction is in many ways dependent on the notions of truth and reality in order to come about. The understanding of imagination is contradicted by the rational, and invented possibilities are opposed to objective certainties. But Woolf does not let her reader rest within either one of these categories. Despite the appearance of binary pairs or dichotomies, Woolf does not resolve the relevant parts of her text into the one or the other. The same manner the narrative is countered by the essayistic, the achronological is countered by the chronological, and the singular 'I' is countered by the multiple, so is the notion of reality and fiction is negotiated, bent, and commented on. I begin my analysis by approaching the many conceptions of fictions at work in *A Room*. Continuing along the lines of the second chapter of this thesis, I suggest that part of Woolf's argument rests on the writer's ability to create and provide a connection between reality and fiction. Because the imaginations of the narrator sometimes are used strategically, this feature will also be part of the discussion. My argument hinges on the fact that the narrator makes use of her creative imaginations in order to set forth the argument.

Because Woolf creates an alternative line of history in *A Room*, this is also one of my inquiries. As Gillian Beer puts it, "[h]istory' in almost a textbook sense, is a recurrent theme in her work" (7). Most prominently, perhaps, Melba Cuddy-Keane's contextualisation of Woolf's works suggests Woolf's heightened awareness of both the historical positioning of the reader, the writer, and the historian. As she puts it, "Woolf's writings subvert the traditional history" and she "alters the construction of history from fixed to kinetic" (2003 148-149). In common with Cuddy-Keane, Elena Gualtieri connects the sense of history with Woolf's interest in the 'lives of the obscure' and more specifically to use of fiction and literary history; "[t]he search for a different form of criticism that would combine fiction and essays was motivated for Woolf by the desire to give a voice to those part of literary history that could not find a representation in conventional accounts" (36). The second section of this chapter considers the way in which the unrecorded experiences of women are entangled with history, reality, and fiction and thus come about in the essay.

The fact that the narrative composition lets us perceive parts of the text as expressed through Woolf's own voice and 'I' suggests that these experiences could be accompanied by events from Woolf's personal and public life. Although Woolf's writing was not autobiographical in *A Room* in the most obvious sense, I argue that both her voice and experience accompany those of other. In their works on autobiography, both Linda Anderson

and Laura Marcus draw our attention to how fragments of Woolf's life or autobiographical details work themselves into many of her texts. An approach gestured towards the presence of a 'personal Woolf' is also supported by the essay genre, which in many ways depends on personal experience. A closer look at how Woolf has written herself into the discourse of *A Room* is yet another way to show that the fictitious 'I' cannot only be regarded as distanced and impersonal. In many ways, there is a framework of fictions, a historical framework, and an autobiographical framework through which it is possible to approach *A Room*. The present analysis suggests that they are intertwined.

4.2 The Spheres of Reality and Fiction – Imaginings, History, and Self

4.2.1 Fiction in the Essay: Freedom of the Mind and the Reality of the Writer

My preceding discussion shows how, in *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf sets up an enquiry and an argument where the fictional and the imaginative take precedence over factual and documentary modes of writing. Woolf's tendency to prioritise fictional possibilities rather than the certainties connected with objectivity is often brought to the fore in the critical debate. Because Woolf's 'talk' revolves around the ambiguous topic of 'women and fiction' and evolves into an argument about the necessary conditions for women to write fiction, the connections between fiction and reality emerge as important. Supporting Woolf's argument, the detours into fiction and history illuminate this topic, illustrating possible continuities and discontinuities between fiction and reality. Furthermore, the fact that some eighty years after it was first published, *A Room* is still a widely read text,¹ suggests that the text provides a connection to the reader's situatedness as well. The reader, at any rate, is the recipient of Woolf's argument, the choice to partly rely on fiction can also be seen in light of persuading the reader. I argue that Woolf's problematisation of 'reality' touches on all these areas and highlights the ways in which fiction and imagination promote freedom of mind. Despite the various functions of the inclusions of fiction in the essay, the boundary associated with the opposition between imagination and the documentary is disturbed.

In the second chapter I argued that the writer is at work in *A Room* and that the writing artist sketches the world for the reader and renders it alive on the page. This is particularly evident at the point where Woolf's narrator willingly defies conventions and changes the season from autumn to spring. As an extension of my argument about the employment of fictional prose, this was seen as a violation of what is expected from an argument, from a

¹ The central role *A Room* occupies within feminist criticism and theory is one of the reasons why it is a widely read text. In line with my argument in chapter two, I would also argue that there are features that simultaneously make it both accessible and challenging for a reader. Such aspects contribute to the long life of a text.

didactic statement, or perhaps even from an essay. In parts of *A Room*, Woolf seems to argue that the real notion of reality does not pertain to what is found in history books, in research, or academic articles. Rather, 'reality', as it were, is understood as a moment or instant which best can be captured by the writer. Such an understanding can be elaborated by Woolf's narrator's own musings on reality. In the answer to her question of what is meant by 'reality', she continues:

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. That 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. Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us. (108)

Woolf here suggests that 'reality' cannot possibly be only what is perceivable on a day to day basis. Yet at the same time she seems to indicate that 'reality' unveils itself in the common sights. She seems to indicate that 'reality' is an all-consuming concept, yet difficult or impossible to fathom. What Woolf describes is something different than the objective certainties extractable from dominant genres commonly understood to concern themselves with reality. Rather, this description indicates that the writer can catch those moments through the means of fiction. This view is substantiated by the fact that Woolf connects this notion of reality to significant works of fiction. Referring to "*Lear* or *Emma* or *La Recherche du temps perdu*" the narrator indicates that these works lay reality bare: "one sees more intensely afterwards; the world seems bared of all its covering and given an intenser life" (108). This does not only signify fiction's capacity to affect our perception of reality, but also indicates the continuities that may exist between fiction and facts.

By contrast, however, Woolf also highlights the incompatibility between fiction and reality with regards to the representation of women:

A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (45)

Connecting this passage to the narrator's musing that "[f]iction must stick to facts" (17), allows us to see beyond the boundaries of fiction and facts. Woolf argues that the two are related to each other. In fact, her understanding of this contradiction between the representation of women in fiction and women in history can be read as one of her insistent

on a more nuanced yet varied depiction of women. Furthermore, it can be read as an insistence on a more 'real' representation of 'reality'.² As the narrator puts it, "the splendid gallery of fictitious women are too simple" (82). The paradox between these two polarised images of women can thus only be remedied when the continuities and discontinuities between reality and fiction are balanced.

Furthermore, the suggestion that the writer is able to capture the so-called 'reality' can be seen in light of Woolf's many encouragements to the women in the audience, women in general, or even the general reader. At many points, Woolf's narrator encourages, even urges, the recipient or the 'you' to write books. Although she does not limit such encouragements to the genres of fiction, many of them do concern fiction. One in particular stands out: "[t]hus when I ask you to write more books I am urging you to do what will be for your good and for the good of the world at large" (108). In connection with the discussion of reality and fiction, this encouragement appears as a democratic statement suggesting that the world would be a better place if women wrote books and were included in the various representations of life in literature. This suggestion gains significance because it is positioned amidst the discussion of reality and the writer's ability to communicate it to the rest of us. Thus, the encouragement to write books is an insistence that women should write themselves into the public sphere. This has been noted by numerous critics. Anna Snaith, for instance, emphasises how Woolf "believed that women needed to write themselves into the public sphere" (12).

However, a rhetorical intention behind such comments can, in fact, also be discerned. By providing the many connections between fiction and reality in the text, Woolf legitimises her own use of fiction. If Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and Marcel Proust can better be understood to catch reality through fiction than George Macaulay Trevelyan is able to catch it through documentary modes of writing, the narrator's own musings into fiction is justified. In fact, by stating that these writers open the door to reality through fiction, Woolf provides the possibility that her own digressions into fiction may have a similar function. At least, the epistemology of *A Room*'s textual universe allows for claims to be set forth in fiction, but still have an impact in the factual world. Because the argument in *A Room* partly relies on fiction, the connection between fiction and facts becomes crucial for the way in which the narrator's claims come about. However, although it is possible to argue that the connections Woolf sets

² Again, as in chapter two, the connection between the moment, perception of reality, and the writer can be seen in light of modernist aesthetics. When *A Room* is approached in this manner, some of the points that surface liken the texts to essays such as "Modern Fiction", which is concerned with the new modes of writing of the modernist period.

up between other works of fiction and the notion of ‘reality’ are strategic, this is perhaps but a minor function.

There are other more striking examples where fictions and constructions of the narrator’s imagination or storyworld function rhetorically. For instance, the very epitome of patriarchy, Professor von X, has a potential disarming function on critical readers. Tracy Seeley suggests that Professor von X is a substitution for a logical rhetorical movement (38). From another perspective he has a rhetorical function as a stand-in or decoy for the real ‘great men’ of patriarchy. When presented with an image of fiction, the reader’s attention is guided away from questions regarding the validity of the narrator’s assessment; the reader’s attention is kept on the argument and the notion of patriarchy as presented in the essay:

I had been drawing a face, a figure. It was the face and the figure of Professor von X engaged in writing his monumental work entitled *The Mental, Moral, and Physical Inferiority of the Female Sex*. He was not in my picture a man attractive to women. He was heavily built; he had a great jowl; to balance that he had very small eyes; he was very red in the face. His expression suggested that he was labouring under some emotion that made him jab his pen on the paper as if he were killing some noxious insect as he wrote, but even when he had killed it that did not satisfy him; he must go on killing it; and even so, some cause for anger and irritation remained. (32-33)

On a mere functional level, then, and with regards to communication, it is possible to consider the inclusion of the fictitious Professor von X as part of a strategic and rhetorical choice made in order to persuade the reader of the presented argument. As mentioned in the second and third chapters, critics have been acutely interested in Woolf’s awareness of the potential male audience. Alex Zwerdeling contends that this “heightened awareness of a possibly hostile audience strongly affects the tone of *A Room*” (255). By relying on fiction, the real-life counterpart can be left out. Instead of charging the real men of patriarchy with the accusations she brings to the professor, the more direct charges against patriarchy are directed at the somewhat humorous and fictive image of him.³

Furthermore, as I also commented on in chapter three, through the image of Professor von X Woolf creates a collective term for professors, and by extension patriarchy. By disregarding the specificities related to Professor von X’s identity, Woolf presents a more universal image which is not dependent on the historical situatedness of the text. Despite Professor von X’s fictiveness, Woolf manages not only to link him to the narrator’s fictional universe and Woolf’s contemporary England. Professor von X becomes the symbol of any patriarch society where the professor dominates. Some eighty years later, it is still possible to consider Professor von X as the same symbol. By materialising the professor through a

³Although *A Room* does charge the real men of patriarchy with claims about their faulty understanding of women and the world, this does not always happen directly. Thus, Professor von X is both a strategic and an ideological image.

drawing on a piece of paper, and thus ascribing him with certain qualities, Woolf presents an immortal version of the symbol for patriarchy. Whereas contemporary professors with views similar to that of Professor von X might have been forgotten and ridiculed based on the invalidity of their claims, Professor von X does not fade. This complicates common boundaries between reality and fiction and the professor can be seen on four different levels: within the narrator's imagination, in her fictional reality, in Woolf's contemporary reality, and in the reality of the reader. These spheres are situated at different points in history, and draws attention to the ways in which fiction does not cease to matter even when time passes.

When it comes to strategic or rhetorical inclusions of fictions in *A Room*, there are other examples that present themselves as important. For instance, Mary Carmichael's novel *Life's Adventures* both complicates the relationship between fiction and reality, and has a strategic function. As I will come back to, Carmichael's novel is both important for the notion of women's literary history and the lives of the obscure. In this context, however, being a fictitious construction is an advantage for the narrator's mediation. Woolf refers to Carmichael's book in order to bring a number of points about. For instance, when claiming that "Mary is tampering with the expected sequence" (81), Woolf initiates the argument that the dominant model for writing is not suited for a woman. Furthermore, the flaws of Carmichael's novel is emphasised in order to substantiate her claim that the book would be better if the fictional author had a room of her own and five hundred a year. The fact that the book is fictitious becomes a rhetorical move in Woolf's argumentation. By using a fictional novel, she avoids disagreement. Together with the focal restrictions of the first-person narrator, this feature prevents the reader from arguing for or against the narrator's opinion. By contrast, however, the fact that the novel *could* be real adds to the way in which Woolf destabilises the notion of fiction and reality. Carmichael's novel is found in the British Museum, which is not a fictitious construction.

The preceding discussion illustrates the many tensions that Woolf locates between reality and fiction. The inclusion of fiction subverts common boundaries, but the images of imagination also have a communicative facet which affects the reading. Thus, the very events that the narrator and Woolf choose to comment on and include suggest that the strategic and argumentative facets of the text are intertwined. The tensions between facts and fiction can also be more explicitly related to the genres of fiction and nonfiction. Woolf's narrator suggests that the hierarchy of experiences connected with the latter is problematic:

For in imagination I had gone into a shop; it was laid with black and white paving; it was hung, astonishingly beautifully, with coloured ribbons. Mary Carmichael might well have a look at that in passing, I thought, for it is a sight that would lend itself to the pen as fittingly as any snowy peak or

rocky gorge in the Andes. And there is the girl behind the counter too — I would as soon have her true history as the hundred and fiftieth life of Napoleon or seventieth study of Keats and his use of Miltonic inversion which old Professor Z and his like are now inditing. (89)

Here, the events of the daily life of the girl behind the counter are contrasted with the studies of 'great men'. The fact that the narrator must use her imagination to enter the shop or access details of this girl's life, lets Woolf argue that 'her true history' – if it was recorded – is as important as yet another biography of Napoleon. The political act of inventing is directly tied in with the more strategic facet of the choice to include imaginative scenes. Often the narrator must invent and include strains of fiction simply because there is no alternative. As Gillian Beer puts it in connection with Woolf's works in general, "[a]bsence gives predominance to memory and to imagination" (29). In *A Room*, it is particularly imagination that is suggested as the remedy to the silences in history. The ordinary experience is contrasted with the great deeds of history: "[y]ou have never made a discovery of any sort of importance. You have never shaken an empire or led an army into battle. The plays of Shakespeare are not by you, and you have never introduced a barbarous race to the blessings of civilization" (110). The view that historical narratives have left something out becomes particularly articulate in one of the other imaginative moments of the narrator:

With the eye of the imagination I saw a very ancient lady crossing the street on the arm of a middle-aged woman, her daughter, perhaps, both so respectably booted and furred that their dressing in the afternoon must be a ritual, and the clothes themselves put away in cupboards with camphor, year after year, throughout the summer months. They cross the road when the lamps are being lit (for the dusk is their favourite hour), as they must have done year after year. The elder is close on eighty; but if one asked her what her life has meant to her, she would say that she remembered the streets lit for the battle of Balaclava, or had heard the guns fire in Hyde Park for the birth of King Edward the Seventh. And if one asked her, longing to pin down the moment with date and season, but what were you doing on the fifth of April 1868, or the second of November 1875, she would look vague and say that she could remember nothing. For all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it. (88)

The elder woman is representative of the ordinary life of women in the nineteenth century and her own understanding of her life is coloured by the collective memory presented in history books. In addition to signifying what critics refer to as the "filling in of the gaps of history through the power of fiction and of the imagination" (Gualtieri 119), the passage is an explicit comment on how the dominant narratives affect the individual and her self-awareness. The ordinary moments of this woman's life are lost to her own memory because her life events are not deemed important in communal life. Moreover, the power of fiction presented in these two examples does not only give voice to the silences in history, it also has a destabilising function. The narrator suggests that events cannot be disregarded on the basis that they are fiction because they *could* be true or real. Thus, fiction fuels the ideological facet of the text:

it promotes freedom of mind. As the narrator puts it herself in the exclamation to the Beadle, “there is no gate, no lock, no bolt, that you can set upon the freedom of my mind” (76).

4.2.2 From Fiction to History: New Storylines in the Dominant Tradition

The preceding examples illustrates how the narrator uses the ‘eye of the imagination’ to approach details of women’s lives that are overlooked in the predominant narratives. As many have noted before me, this is the key issue in Woolf’s insistence that the “lives of the obscure needed to be written, recovered, [and] published” (Snaith 12). This calling can be seen in light of the narrator’s own encouragement to Mary Carmichael: “[a]ll these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded, I said, addressing Mary Carmichael as if she were present; and went on in thought through the streets of London feeling in imagination the pressure of dumbness, the accumulation of unrecorded life” (89). And yet, by addressing Mary Carmichael the narrator is also addressing herself. Furthermore, *A Room*, the very text in which the narrator acts as the protagonist – the text she can be understood to have written, to have thought, constructed and invented – is in many ways also figured as the beginning of such a recording. *A Room* is also a collection of the many experiences of women writing, systemised into what Melba Cuddy-Keane labels the “linear evolutionary history of women’s writing” (99). As presented in chapter two, the germs of the lives of other women render the possibility of other storylines, other details, personal, extraordinary, and even ordinary experiences. These are the experiences that are left unrecorded in the ellipses amidst the topics of Professor Trevelyan’s *History of England*. As Elena Gualtieri puts it, “*A Room* presents a vision of history that stresses its role in the suppression and erasure of women voices” (117). It is this tradition and storyline I argue that Woolf writes herself into. Before elaborating this argument, however, I want to show how the history of women writers comes about.

In *A Room*, the history of women writers and their lives begins with the familiar story of Judith Shakespeare; the aspiring poet whose life was so different from her brother’s. As Gillian Beer puts it, the text “creates a counter history in the image of Shakespeare’s sister” (7). It is the prime example of how fiction must permeate because there are no written records of the lives women actually led. As I will come back to, the story that Judith initiates is not only a counter history, it is a supplement to history as well as a means of placing women within the dominant tradition. In a more chronological view of the matter, the history of

women writers begins in the end of the essay when the narrator recounts that “women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time” (106).⁴

Although the narrative about the literary history of women starts off on fictional terms, it continues in terms of historical facts. The narrator continues the line of women writers with the factual details of Anne Finch (1661-1720), or Lady Winchilsea: “[s]he was born in the year 1661; she was noble both by birth and by marriage; she was childless; she wrote poetry” (59). The narrator then recites her poetry, and the circumstances concerning her writing. Her writing was “distracted with hates and grievances” (60), qualities that are connected with her resentment to men’s “power to bar her way to what she wants to do” (60). Yet although she is ‘real’ in the sense of having lived, the narrator also asserts that when one is seeking “out the facts about Lady Winchilsea, one finds, as usual, that almost nothing is known about her” (61). Thus, the conflicting forces of fiction and nonfiction are present, highlighted by the temptation to invent. Winchilsea’s personal experience is nevertheless presented as what resembles a part of a historical narrative.

The narrator continues with the Duchess, Margaret of Newcastle, Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), Lady Winchilsea’s “elder, but her contemporary” (62). She might have been a poet too but because she was lonely, shut out and not taught, her writing “poured itself out, higgledy-piggledy, in torrents of rhyme and prose, poetry and philosophy which stand congealed in quartos and folios that nobody ever reads” (62). Again, the narrator includes details of her personal life in order to comment on the writing. From ‘the crazy Duchess’ the narrator continues to the letter writer Dorothy Osborne (1627-1695) and includes parts of a letter concerning the impropriety of the Duchess’ writings. The narrator sets this in connection with the fact that Osborne herself did not dare to write: “since no woman of sense and modesty could write books, Dorothy, who was sensitive and melancholy, the very opposite of the Duchess in temper, wrote nothing” (63). In this manner, these writers are presented as part of a historical narrative, while at the same time bringing their personal lives, individual differences, and experiences to the fore. The narrator concludes this portion of the history of women writers by referring to Aphra Behn (1640-1689) who was – due to her husband’s death and other unfortunate incidents – forced to make her own living by her pen and wits: “[a]nd with Mrs Behn we turn a very important corner on the road [...] for here begins the freedom of the mind” (64).

⁴ In terms of narrative theory this is exemplary of the way in which the events are ordered differently in the narrative discourse than the way they actually happened in (hi)story.

There are several topics emerging from this segment of the history of women writers. The first point to be made is that this linear presentation is not made to function as excluding and essentialist history. Rather, it is “designed to clear a space for the future [not] to fix the past” (Cuddy-Keane 99). This observation is particularly important because Woolf’s narrator connects these women’s individual and particular ways of writing to genres that would benefit from their gifts. As I argued in chapter two, features of Woolf’s textuality can be read as a means of opening the dominant genres to more voices. Furthermore, the personal lives of these women become indispensable for the argument. Presenting their experiences as historical facts allows Woolf to progress the argument, and to substantiate the claim that personal and material conditions matter. Seen thus, her argumentation is not that different from what one might find in an academic journal. However, because the descriptions of these women’s lives are sprinkled with tentative phrases such as ‘must have’ and ‘could have’, and because the narrator is tempted to invent, assumptions or even fictions are allowed to play the same role as facts. Similarly, the use of the imperative phrase ‘should have’ indicates the possibility of an alternative line of events. Moreover, and with more specific regards to the narrative dimension of the text, these women’s storyline progresses alongside the narrator’s fictional story.

The storyline continues with the change that came about at the end of the eighteenth century when “[t]he middle-class woman began to write” (66). And here the narrator makes a passage to the great female novelists of the nineteenth century – Jane Austen (1775-1817), Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855), Emily Brontë (1818-1848), and George Eliot (1819-1880) – who all had in common that they were childless, born into the middleclass, and “without more experience of life than could enter the house of a respectable clergyman” (71). In the same manner as with the representation of their predecessors, the personal lives of these women are related to their writing. Similarly, their writing is connected with genres they might have been better at. The narrator finds it peculiar that these very different women all wrote novels. Jane Austen’s story of doing her writing in the general sitting-room partly explains why middleclass women wrote novels. Furthermore, despite the fact that Austen lacked experience and adventures, the narrator finds that only Charlotte Brontë’s work suffered from this scarcity: “[s]he knew, no one better, how enormously her genius would have profited [...] if experience and intercourse and travel had been granted her” (70). Regardless of the differences in their prose, the narrator considers the two as novelists. Emily Brontë, however, “should have written poetic plays; the overflow of George Eliot’s capacious mind should have

spread itself when the creative impulse was spent upon history or biography” (68). Again the narrator indicates that other genres would have profited from the contribution of women.

The presence of these women’s individual storylines is presented not just a means to narrate their story, but rather as a way of connecting the personal experiences of the past with the present situations. The connections made between these women’s lives personal experiences, their material conditions, and their writing become crucial for the way Woolf challenges and subverts patriarchal assumptions of abilities being innate. Furthermore, what Laura Marcus calls “Woolf’s construction of an independent female literary tradition” or a “separate story of women’s literary development” (2004 43) becomes crucial for the way in which Woolf presents women’s position in relation to the dominant tradition. These aspects are connected with the traditions of literature and women’s position in relation to it. Finch, Cavendish, Osborne and Behn are seen as inevitable for later writers:⁵ “[w]ithout those forerunners, Jane Austen and the Brontës and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer, or Chaucer without those forgotten poets who paved the ways and tamed the natural savagery of the tongue” (66). This literary history of women writers, then, is not only necessary for the argument about masterpieces being “the outcome of many years of thinking in common” (66), but also for the famous argument that “we think back through our mothers if we are women” (76). Thus, Woolf emphasises that retrieving the lost voices will enable the voices of women to be heard in the future.⁶

Along this recounting of history, however, there are constant comments on male writers and the masculine literary tradition. Thus, I would argue that *A Room* does not only aim to retrieve and construct a model for the history of women’s writing. Additionally, the essay places these important female contributions within the discourse of a literary history where men are also present. From this perspective, the tradition of female writers must be included in the leading tradition for the literary culture and history to be complete. The tension between a separate female tradition and a common one for both genders is reflected in later decades’ feminist criticism. Without going any further into this, I would note that the stance reflected in *A Room* seems similar to some of Toril Moi’s observations on the matter. Constructing a female literary tradition unavoidably emphasises women as a separate group. Because this group springs out of patriarchy, Moi sees the problem as “how to avoid bringing

⁵ It should be mentioned that amongst these writers, other women writers are briefly commented on as well.

⁶ In this regard, Woolf and *A Room*’s contribution to feminist criticism’s dedication to retrieve lost voices and to the publishing of women’s writing is crucial. As Anne Fernald writes, without it “countless projects recovering lost voices might not have been undertaken” (5).

patriarchal notions of aesthetics, history, and tradition to bear on the ‘female tradition’” (82). In *A Room*, Woolf implies that a literary tradition should leave room for the contrasting and multiple ways of writing. Such a view is convergent with aspects of Woolf’s feminism. Alex Zwerdeling states that she is “reluctant, even in her most radical phases, to abandon altogether the ideal of women and men working in harmony for the same goals” (260). However, this view does not exclude the importance of the narrator’s point that “[women] wrote as women write” (70). As with the coexistence of opposing forms in *A Room*, this view suggests the possibility of reconciling something which is deemed incompatible.⁷

Before moving on to my argument about how Woolf positions herself in this tradition, there are more comments to be made about the historical narrative of female writers. The narrator proceeds “to the shelves which hold books by the living [...], Jane Harrison’s books on Greek archaeology; Vernon Lee’s books on aesthetics; Gertrude Bell’s books on Persia” (79). This portion does not include references to the personal experience of the writers. Rather, Woolf’s focus has shifted to the freedom for women to write within any genre. Still, because the narrator’s interest lies with the topic of women and fiction, she seeks out one of the novels in the British Museum. After reading *Life’s Adventures* and relating it to the reader, its fictional author, Mary Carmichael, she comes to stand for the future as well: “[g]ive her another hundred years, I concluded, reading the last chapter [...] and she will write a better book one of these days” (93). By the time the narrator has reached the end of her story, the history of women’s writing has progressed far into the future. It ends or returns to the mythological beginning of the historical narrative that Woolf has constructed: “[Judith] lives in you and me, and many other women [...] for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh” (111-112). Again, there are prospects of a brighter future when women begin to write.

Despite these specific storylines, or at least germs of specific personal storylines, there is also a focus on all the stories that are *not* recorded. As the narrator calls the stories in her dialogue with Mary Carmichael: “the accumulation of unrecorded life” (89). For instance, in relation to Aphra Behn, the narrator states: “[f]or now that Aphra Behn had done it, girls could go to their parents and say, You need not give me an allowance; I can make money by my pen. Of course the answer for many years to come was, Yes by living the life of Aphra Behn! Death would be better! And the door was slammed faster than ever” (64-65). Here, the

⁷ Again, this view can be connected with Woolf’s argument about androgyny. However, as I have already indicated, androgyny cannot simply be understood as the merging of two opposing forms or sexes. Furthermore, Woolf also suggests a greater multiplicity: “two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness of the world” (87).

beginnings of all those stories of girls and women who wanted to write are touched upon, as a beginning, or even an end, of a potential story. Similarly, the narrator also evokes Anon, thinking that Anon “who wrote so many poems without signing them was often a woman” (50-51). The notion of women and writing is thus connected with the unknown lives of girls, ordinary women, or potential writers. These unwritten lives are briefly introduced or told mainly in the form of fiction as with the girl in the shop and the elderly lady. Recording the unknown lives of women also fuels the narrator’s view of the future and the belief that Judith Shakespeare will come back: “[d]rawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born” (112). The notion of retrieving these lost stories is once more linked both to the canon and to the future of fiction and women’s place in history. This double connection coincides with one of the narrator’s first comments that the topic of women and fiction denotes a myriad of connections and that all of these may be intertwined.

The focus on personal experience suggests a space for female subjectivity which is not deemed inferior by the masculine or dominant values that affect life writing, historiography and fiction. Accordingly, there is a tension between the norms often associated with subjectivity and objectivity. The comments on history initiated by the segments Woolf chooses to include suggest that precedence should also be given to the ordinary experiences and not only to the great deeds of history. This view surfaces through the way in which Woolf includes a number of experiences and potential storylines in order to provide multiple truths. As Anna Snaith puts it, “[t]ruths, for Woolf, are multiple, changing, and can only be conveyed through stories, through partial, contingent and specific narratives” (49). These truths dismantle both the dominant view of historiography and of literary history and tradition. Amongst the specific storylines and the unknown storylines connected with Anon, however, we find the germ of another storyline: Woolf’s own story.

4.2.3 The Personal Virginia Woolf: an Anecdotal Self amongst Women Writers

“On Saturday, 20 October 1928, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, together with Vanessa Bell and her daughter Angelica, drove from London to Cambridge where Virginia was to read a paper to the undergraduates of Newnham College” (Rosenbaum xv). Thus starts the real tale of the lecture in *A Room of One’s Own*. It continues the following Friday, 26 October 1928,⁸ when Virginia Woolf again went to Cambridge to give the Girton talk. On this occasion, she took

⁸ Recalling the date of the narrator’s date for her last day of research in the British Museum suggests yet another ambiguous connection between reality and fiction.

the train with Vita and they later met Julian. Hermione Lee continues emphasises that “[Woolf] fuses the two occasions together” (564) and refers to them as one: “[t]hank God, my long toil at the women’s lecture is this moment ended” (*D* III 200). Similarly, Naomi Black highlights how “Woolf regularly mixed fiction, not to say fantasy, as well as biography into her more conventional essays. Most relevant, *A Room of One’s Own* incorporated fiction and disguised autobiography in what looked like a straightforward didactic statement” (74-75). This fusion of real events which, according to Lee, starts in her diary, is apparent in the text on several levels and provides further connections between Woolf’s life and *A Room*.

As I argued in the third chapter, details of the narrative and the composition let us perceive parts of the narrator’s ‘I’ as Woolf’s own self. Despite Woolf’s insistence that details of *A Room* are not autobiographical, and despite the narrator’s assurance that everything she is going to tell is fiction, there are several elements in the essay which not only signify the argument, but also portend ideas and experiences important to Woolf’s life and practice. This is particularly relevant in light of Alex Zwerdeling’s view that “Woolf rethinks politics into her own tongue” (31) and that “her personal experience and involvement give her the authority to question the accepted wisdom on the subject” (31). With regards to *A Room* such a view becomes particularly important because of the connection between reality and fiction. In an essay where everything is asserted as fiction or even presented as having ‘no existence’, a question emerges as to what might be real. As Black states in relation to fact and fiction in *A Room* and *Three Guineas*, “[t]he issue is how to disentangle the fiction from the fact” (75). An enquiry as to how every little detail of *A Room* might stem from Woolf’s own life, however, is not of utmost importance. This analysis will nevertheless suggest ways in which events in the essay are linked to Woolf’s own experiences. As Leila Brosnan has noted, Woolf presents the self anecdotally. This suggests the importance of the strains from her life and can also relate to Woolf’s emphasis on stories and multiple truths.

Emerging from the fusion of the real-life lectures, the example of Chloe liking Olivia serves as a starting point:

I am sorry to break off so abruptly. Are there no men present? Do you promise me that behind that red curtain over there the figure of Sir Chartres Biron is not concealed? We are all women you assure me? Then I may tell you that the very next words I read were these — ‘Chloe liked Olivia . . .’ Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women.

‘Chloe liked Olivia,’ I read. And then it struck me how immense a change was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature. (81)

This passage recalls more than one event from Woolf’s life and experience which are all closely connected. First of all, the notion of Chloe liking Olivia makes a suggestion towards

homosexuality. Because of this indication and the reference to Sir Chartres Biron, perhaps hiding behind the curtain, the example evokes the trial against Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* where Sir Chartres Biron was the magistrate and Woolf was supposed to testify. As Quentin Bell notes "[t]he case came on six days before the publication of *Orlando* and five days after Virginia had [...] identified herself with the cause of homosexuality by spending a week in France alone with Vita" (QB II 139). Lee further connects these events to Woolf's lectures: "[s]he came home to three closely connected events: the publication of *Orlando* [...], the *Well of Loneliness* trial, and her two lectures on 'Women and Fiction' at Cambridge" (519). Thus, this passage actually relates the main events in Woolf's life in the autumn of 1928, and highlights the historical context of the essay. As we have seen in chapter three, the lecture setting and the way she plays with conventions associated with the lecture form come to stand both for Woolf's distrust of academia and her democratic view and use of dialogue. Furthermore, it is difficult not to link Chloe and Olivia to Vita and Virginia's relationship. The subtle reference to Sir Chartres Biron voices a concern with censorship, which Woolf had strong opinions about.

The cornerstone in *A Room*, the title itself and the narrator's opinion, "that it is necessary to have five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door if you are to write fiction or poetry" (103), can be grounded in Woolf's own life or at least biography. From early on, she had concerns about space and privacy, especially with regards to reading and writing. Until her sister Stella's marriage she had no room of her own. Because of this, Quentin Bell explains, her reading and writing had to be done elsewhere in the house, but that "wherever she might settle, she made a fortress from which she was not easily driven" (51). Alex Zwerdeling connects this early sense and awareness of Woolf's need for privacy with the title of and slogan in *A Room*, and refers to an early diary entry where she protests "that her father refuses to treat her room as her refuge" (163). In her adult life, these were still important issues, and a private room was always essential to her writing. Similar to how the narrator relates it in the essay, Woolf also understood money as the means for acquiring a room. In a diary entry from March 1929 Woolf writes: "[n]o more poverty I said; & poverty has ceased. I am summoning Philcox next week to plan a room — I have money to build it, money to furnish it" (*D* III 219-220). This entry corresponds to the ideas in the essay, and as Hermione Lee concludes "[t]he new room at Monk's House and the 'room of her own' of her essay are connected" (556). Woolf was also perfectly aware of what money had done for her, especially in terms of freedom to read and write. Lee also points out that Woolf had only been

earning the amount of five hundred since 1926, and although she had never been poor, she nevertheless knew what it meant to lack the power of being able to spend money (556-57).

The manner in which the narrator obtains the freedom to spend money can also be connected with Woolf's life. The narrator inherits the money from her aunt:

My aunt, Mary Beton, I must tell you, died by a fall from her horse when she was riding out to take the air in Bombay. The news of my legacy reached me one night about the same time that the act was passed that gave votes to women. A solicitor's letter fell into the post-box and when I opened it I found that she had left me five hundred pounds a year for ever. Of the two — the vote and the money — the money, I own, seemed infinitely the more important. (38-39)

In a letter to Harmon H. Goldstone, Woolf denies that there is any connection between the legacy of Mary Beton and her own aunt (*L V* 91). Yet this event might be the event most critics refer to when making suggestions towards Woolf's presence in the text. In 1909 Woolf did inherit money from her aunt which leads Juliet Dusinberre to call the aunt "sober history" (25). It was a legacy of £2,500 gross, "a legacy which would later be mythologised as the means to a room of her own" (Lee 67). Elaine Showalter sees this mythologisation of both the aunt and the money as one of the many reasons why the essay is defensive and impersonal because Woolf's money was inherited from her 'Quaker Aunt', the 'Nun' "Caroline Emilia Stephen, whose life was much less romantic" (283).⁹ From another perspective, the inclusion of the aunt is seen as a less monumental way of incorporating personal experience.¹⁰

At any rate, despite the fictitiousness of the way our narrator gains her freedom to write from her aunt's money, it is difficult not to think of Woolf and her own aunt. Continuing her story, the narrator contrasts her life after the inheritance – free of bitterness, being able to pay for her meal and have ten-shilling notes in her purse – with the life she led before Mary Beton left her the money:

Before that I had made my living by cadging odd jobs from newspapers, by reporting a donkey show here or a wedding there; I had earned a few pounds by addressing envelopes, reading to old ladies, making artificial flowers, teaching the alphabet to small children in a kindergarten. (39)

In the same letter to Goldstone, Woolf dismisses attempts made to draw a connection and emphasises that she had always had money: "I have had an independent income ever since I was of age; and I have never had to write for money or pursue any profession" (*L V* 91). However, although Woolf was privileged in her life, she had experiences where the concept of an income got in the way of her writing. In her own life, she was torn between the wish to write and the notion of earning money. Her early writing earned her the first cheques in 1905.

⁹ In light of this, the reason for giving Mary Beton a voice in *A Room* can be connected with her aunt. This is but a minor point, but it could nevertheless be suggested that Caroline Emilia Stephen is one of the women Woolf gives voice to in her essay.

¹⁰ In relation to the argument about anger and personal grievance in *A Room*, this way of transforming personal experience is in concordance with the ideas Woolf presents.

It was no problem for her to find work in literary journals, papers and magazines. In these positions, however, she had to take what she was assigned and she could not write freely and was always under editorial pressure. This was an obstacle in her development to become the writer she wanted to be and made it difficult for her to find her own voice. Thus, the joy of earning her own money was mixed with the frustration of writing for and having to please someone else (Lee 214-216).¹¹ Although she never had to teach children, she had experiences similar to her narrator. But instead of incorporating her own experiences, Woolf reworks them and transforms them into something which transcends the merely personal. Her own experience is presented as a part of and a continuation of communal history and common experience:

The extreme activity of mind which showed itself in the later eighteenth century among women – the talking, and the meeting, the writing of essays on Shakespeare, the translating of the classics – was founded on the solid fact that women could make money by writing. (65)

Woolf's experience with making money by writing becomes an extension of this professionalisation of the writing of women. Her experience is not only in common with her narrator, but also with those women she has included the storylines of. Thus, she places herself in the continuation of the history she has constructed. Woolf becomes a part of the change that came about in the eighteenth century. As the narrator puts it "a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully and think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses" (66).

Returning to the argument in the essay, there are other components which corresponds to Woolf's historical reality and her writing practice as a public figure. Many elements of the argument that were initiated in another textual form years earlier. As Laura Marcus suggests, "Woolf's 'paper on women' seems to have taken initial form in her exchanges with [Desmond] MacCarthy, published in the *New Statesman*" (36). In it MacCarthy agrees with Arnold Bennett's view that intellect is a typical masculine trait. Woolf 1920 reply anticipates crucial aspects of *A Room*:

It seems to be that the conditions which made it possible for a Shakespeare to exist are that he shall have had predecessors in his art, shall make one of a group where art is freely discussed and practiced, and shall himself have the utmost freedom of thought and experience. Perhaps in Lesbos, but never since, have these conditions been the lot of women. (Letter to the Editor, *The New Statesman*, 1920)

The main constituents of the argument are clearly present. The fact that 'a Shakespeare' has predecessors in his art is not far from the notion that "we think back through our mothers if

¹¹ Dusinberre makes the connection between the legacy and Woolf's writing even more explicit, stating that the money prompted her to begin her first novel, *A Voyage Out*, and to "reassess her own professionalism, in order to find a new way of reconciling writing and being" (28).

we are women” (77), and thus women writers lack precursors. The elaboration of what conditions are necessary for ‘a Shakespeare’ to exist is not far from elaborating on the conditions from which the Judith Shakespeare of *A Room* ceases to exist: “she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone reading Horace or Virgil” (49). Also, the freedom of thought and experience presupposes money or a certain standard of living. Moreover, these come together in the idea that women have been shut out, and thus such conditions are unavailable to women. Consequently, elements of *A Room* form a continuation from Woolf’s writing in her historical reality and public space.¹²

The notion of being shut out, evident in Woolf’s reply to MacCarthy, is also closely linked to her own life and reality. At one point, the narrator is imagining what could have happened if mothers (Mrs Seton) had gone into business and were allowed to own property, and wonders what would have happened if they were not shut out from the world as controlled by patriarchy. In this alternative storyline, the Parthenon makes an appearance:

If only Mrs Seton and her mother and her mother before her had learnt the great art of making money and had left their money, like their fathers and their grandfathers before them, to found fellowships and lectureships and prizes and scholarships appropriated to the use of their own sex, we might have dined very tolerably up here alone off a bird and a bottle of wine; we might have looked forward without undue confidence to a pleasant and honourable lifetime spent in the shelter of one of the liberally endowed professions. We might have been exploring or writing; mooning about the venerable places of the earth; sitting contemplative on the steps of the Parthenon. (23)

Though only mentioned once, the connection that is made between money, material freedom, education and Greece in this passage has bearings upon Woolf’s own life and is extremely relevant for the argument in *A Room*. Learning Greek and studying the classics were strong indications of a formal education both in Woolf’s life and her contemporary society.¹³ Although she received training in Greek, it was always in the form of lessons at home, not like Thoby who was sent to Cambridge. As Dusi Berre writes, “Virginia Woolf’s resentment of her exclusion from her brothers’ educational world, both at school and at Cambridge, always expressed itself in terms of an exclusion from Latin and Greek” (48). Woolf also voices the matter of education in a letter to Ethel Smyth: “[l]ook here am I uneducated, because my brothers used all the family funds which is the fact” (*L V* 195). To Woolf, the notion of education was also personal in terms of family relations as her “Greek lessons were above all a way of keeping pace with [Thoby]” (Lee 144). The imaginative sitting on the steps of the Parthenon is a merging of personal experience, historical setting and argument. It is

¹² Additionally, it should be mention that Woolf does include both subtle and direct reference to MacCarthy’s strands throughout the essay. Because Woolf both continues the textuality and comments on his arguments, I would argue that Woolf’s inclusion of the strains from this earlier exchange serves as part of the text’s politics.

¹³ This is one of the aspects Woolf plays with in her essay “On Not Knowing Greek”.

also a prime example of Woolf's subtle way of letting space evoke the argument, patriarchal and academic dominance.

The notion of space and education in relation to Woolf's reality manifests itself in other ways as well. Through the fictional and factual references to the educational institution, space is important for the destabilising between the categories of fiction and reality. In this regard, the distinction between the extra- and the intradiegetic level is instructive. In many ways, the distinction between the lecture setting and the narrator's story was presented as a distinction between something similar to historical reality and a fictional story. At a first glance, for instance, the locations seem to be referred to by their real names on the extradiegetic level, and the fictive names when we are in the storyworld. Looking closely at the text, however, references are used interchangeably within the intradiegetic level. When the narrator has eaten dinner, for instance, she thinks it poor, but know she has no right to say such a thing: "for I had no more right here in Fernham than in Trinity or Somerville or Girton or Newnham or Christchurch" (20). Here, the narrator refers both to the fictional Fernham but also to colleges in Cambridge and Oxford from which the fictional labels 'Oxbridge' and 'Fernham' are created. Similarly, in her research of what effects both immaterial and material difficulties can have on creativity, she thinks "the psychologists of Newnham and Girton might come to our help, I thought, looking again at the blank spaces on the shelves" (54). In this statement there is no indication of a shift in the narrative situation, and it is narrated in the past tense so typical for the narrator active in her story. In these examples there are no textual or narrative elements indicative of a change on the story level. Thus, they lend themselves to yet another illustration of the mutual use of fiction and reality in the essay, and elucidate Woolf's reluctance to stick to a stable form.

This reluctance can be seen in light of Showalter's comment that the places in *A Room* are a crudely veiled version of Woolf's own life. In actual fact the spaces and locations in the text are more factual than imaginary or fictive. As we have seen in the chapter on narrativity and the storyline, space does not only function as a device for narrative coherence but is also important for the argument posed in the essay. Because most spatial references in *A Room* are in London, locations are important in terms of how the text is historically situated. Its cultural and contextual components come to surface through the evocation of real places connecting women's writing, London, Woolf's argument, contemporary reality, and life:

All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds. It is she — shady and amorous as she was. — who makes it not quite fantastic for me to say to you to-night: Earn five hundred a year by your wits. (65)

This passage illustrates the way in which connotations of space are connected with values and Woolf's own situatedness. This view becomes particularly clear in light of Lee's statements that, "[London] was her key to the culture" and *A Room*, "written in 1929, was as much a book about London as about the history, education and writing of women in England" (553).

There are many London moments that illustrate the connection between values, space, and culture. White Hall and the Admiralty Arch, for instance, evoke masculine dominance. Elephant and Castle or Charing Cross Roads, on the other hand, come to be associated with Judith's death and the many novels by women writers no one reads. As discussed in my second chapter, there is another London moment which helps the narrator's development of the androgyny argument. Although the androgyny argument has silently been advancing in the text, it is nevertheless this moment that prompts the narrator to articulate it. Considering the argument in relation to London and historical situatedness serves to identify contextual elements surrounding this argument. Randi Koppen relates the notion of androgyny and sexual nonconformity to Virginia Woolf's contemporary reality through clothing: in the twenties "sartorial play with identities and self-fashioning constituted a social practice and a mode of thinking that was particularly modern" (27). More specifically, this notion can, in fact, be connected with one of Woolf's concrete experiences. Both Koppen and Lee relate androgyny to the famous Dreadnought Hoax.¹⁴ One can hardly argue that Woolf had this specific event in mind when thinking of androgyny, but it is nevertheless an interesting note in a retrospective reading. At any rate, the connection Koppen makes between culture and clothing becomes particularly relevant in light of Woolf's comment on values in *A Room*: "[y]et it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are 'important'; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes 'trivial'" (74).

A similar connection between the argument, events in the story, and the importance of space is significant in the two contrasting meals the narrator has in Oxbridge and at Fernham. Their real-life counterparts are the meals Virginia Woolf had when she gave the actual lectures in historical reality. Rosenbaum explains that the dinner she ate at Newnham was on Saturday 20 October, and that she "arrived nearly an hour late for the college dinner at which she was to speak" (xv). Referring to the *A Newnham Anthology*, he further reveals that E. E. Phare "thought the dinner at Newnham, though never a gourmet meal, suffered considerably from the late arrival of the guest of honour" (xv). Further in his account of these meals,

¹⁴ Through the Dreadnought Hoax, Woolf and her fellow conspirators fooled the British Navy in "the best-known most sensational of all 'Bloomsbury's' public exploits" (Lee 282). In relation to androgyny, it is Woolf's appearance that makes it important: "[s]he wore a turban, a fine gold chain hanging to her waist and an embroidered caftan. Her face was black. She sported a very handsome moustache and beard" (QB I 157).

Rosenbaum conveys that the day after the Newnham dinner was the day of the luncheon party in King's which, according to the host George Ryland, was probably not as significant as portrayed in the text (xvi). Thus, two more or less insignificant meals are worked in to stand as one of the core components of Woolf's material argument. An indication of the significance these meals will have in Woolf's argument in *A Room* is also found in her diary: "[w]hy should all the splendour, all the luxury of life be lavished on the Julians & the Francises, & none on the Phares & the Thomases?" (*D* III 200). As Rosenbaum rightly puts it, "[t]he books reversal of the order in which Woolf had the meals is a small but interesting illustration of how she transformed autobiography into art" (xvi).

4.3 Blurring the Distinctions – Disturbing the Fine Lines

The preceding discussion has not only demonstrated Woolf's ability to turn autobiography into art, but has also revealed her unique gift of turning autobiography and personal experience into an argument. Furthermore, because elements of Woolf's life permeate in so many important aspects of the text, *A Room* also shows Woolf's extraordinary ability to play with conventions and negotiate fiction and nonfiction. Also, by weaving parts of her own storyline into the experiences of other women writers, Woolf becomes one of the writers in *A Room* and in the emerging literary tradition. She thus places herself as one of the women writers in the alternative line of history that she has created. Because of her reluctance to authoritarianism, egotism and dominance, however, these aspects are not easily discernible. Yet the comment on the dominant masculine tradition does suggest a proposition for coexistence. The preceding analysis shows Woolf's means of including fragments of the self and its experience. Her experiences become a continuation of the experience of earlier women writer. Thus, the notion of 'thinking back through our mothers' does not only entail the literary tradition but also experiences of life. As my third chapter has demonstrated, the textual construction, its content, and generic affiliations enabled Woolf to be simultaneously present in and absent from her work. This paradox collapses boundaries related to the categories of genre, to reality, to history, and to fiction or imagination. In the textual universe of *A Room* these categories merge into each other and present new possibilities for the future of fiction and nonfiction.

I hope to have shown that, in *A Room*, the fusion of fiction and nonfiction and the possibilities of the future also become particularly important in light of voicing the silences in traditional recordings of history. Woolf suggests imagination as an antidote to the silences, but also emphasises that retrieving the lost voices will enable the voices of women to be heard

in the future. Again, she quite strikingly does not draw a distinct line between the fictional and the factual. Both the factual and imaginary events of the past should be included in an understanding of women's life and even common life. This view is strengthened by the connections Woolf sets up between reality and fiction, where the imaginary *could* be as true or real as the factual.

Strikingly, all the elements discussed in this chapter can be related to the narrative composition of a layered story. Through the distinction between the extra- and intradiegetic levels, where the former denotes the lectures and the latter denotes the story, it is tempting to draw the line between fiction and nonfiction here. Yet my analysis has shown how fragments of fiction make appearances on both levels. Similarly, factual details are worked into the fictional story. Thus, the boundaries commonly associated with narrative levels fade and are blurred. These layers blend into each other and the imaginings of the mind become as real and solid as the factual. They too are a part of what we commonly term 'reality'. One cannot be certain of what belongs where: fiction is reality and reality is fiction. As Woolf's narrator puts it: "[f]iction here is likely to contain more truth than fact" (6). Just as fiction is a representation, reality also is a mental construct.

5 A Conclusion: Dissolving the Boundaries

When burying myself in large parts of Virginia Woolf's fiction, her essays, letters, diary, and biography in order to make some remarks about *A Room of One's Own*, while simultaneously placing myself in the plethora of critical discourse on this particular text, I soon realised that "it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion" (*AROO* 5). Furthermore, approaching a conclusion of a thesis where every sentence and suggestion in reality have encouraged a footnote appears an impossible task. Even more pressing, attempting to make conclusions both about Virginia Woolf and about the essay seems highly contradictory because both resist definitions and static approaches. Also, the title of this thesis problematises any strict organisation of the outcome; the notion of dissolving the boundaries suggests the emergence of something plastic which cannot be contain within solid categories. Making a conclusion involves presenting some kind of standpoint which necessarily excludes another. When it comes to Woolf, however, one conclusion can never be enough or sufficient. As my initial discussion began, she as well as her texts must be allowed to be 'both and' instead of 'either or'. To recount James's experience with the double nature of his perception of the lighthouse: "[n]o, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other Lighthouse was true too" (251).

Despite the difficulty inherent in any concluding remarks regarding Woolf, however, this thesis set out to approach the ways in which the narrative strategies, textual techniques, and discursive elements influence the mediation of Woolf's argument in *A Room*. The analysis and discussion have been focussing on the way in which the argument of *A Room* is not only apparent in the content of the essay but also in its form. Throughout my discussion my argument has been that the ideas in the essay pertain to more than one level, involving elements that are formal, structural, textual, and narrative as well as communicational and contextual. Thus, there is no easy manner in which to separate the narrative and textual composition of *A Room* from its argument, its politics, and its ideas. Aligning myself with Toril Moi's view that "remaining detached from the narrative strategies of *Room* is equivalent to not reading it at all" (3), I proposed to discuss specifically *how* and *why* disregarding these strategies is equal to not reading this essay at all.

Such a view surfaced in the second chapter where my analysis revealed that the very process of reading *A Room* is dependent on Woolf's choice to narrativise her argument. The narrative cues and hints are indispensable for the way in which the reader perceives of the story as a whole, and thus for the movement in the text and in the argument. Because the

storyline is both dependent upon time, space, and causality the narrative structure simultaneously guides the reader and furthers the argument. The spatial dimension of the narrative proves to be particularly important for the reader's navigation in the text *and* for the critique of patriarchal values and institutions. In this manner, the narrator's roaming through London and through her own mind becomes necessary for dismantling the hierarchal power structure commonly associated with places such as the British Museum and White Hall. The notion of familiarity also affects the reading. By relying on spaces that the reader is likely to have a preconception of, the mediation of both argument and the story is facilitated. Similarly, the cycle of night and day is a familiar temporality for the reader, which aids her or his movement in the text. More importantly, Woolf depends on the reader's familiarity with traditional plots. Because *A Room* is structured on a traditional arrangement of the plot, the essay reads as a story. This is a violation of the essay genre. By introducing plot and sequences in an essay, Woolf illustrates a quite unconventional move: she pushes the boundaries of genre by means of the conventional. From this perspective, *A Room* can be aligned with the violations of structural conventions in Woolf's modernist novels. Only in this regard, the traditional plot is what is unconventional.

Although the narrative structure and the traditional plot create what was deemed a 'narrative illusion', *A Room* does not dispose of the twists and turns, the digressions, and deviation, which are expected from the genre. The narrator's route in her story swerves out to the margins, into women's experiences, into other stories, into history and research, into fiction and her own musings on the subject of 'women and fiction'. Thus, the reader is always prevented from settling in the illusion of a chronological narrative. It is in these digressions the narrator finds the material for her argument. It is in her *experience* and the *process* of her research that we learn that there are no absolute truths about women and fiction. Furthermore, the narrator's experience with her research is likened to the impended lives women led and this is reflected in the structure. In this sense, the substance of the argument is found in the typical essayistic twists and turns, and the topics that emerge go far beyond 'a room of one's own'. Thus, although the reader is guided by what I termed the essay's purpose, a number of purposes unfold and come about on more than more level: generic violations, formal experiments, as well as the inclusion of multiple stories and a many layered discourse are all intended purposes in *A Room* which also reflect the argument.

The double organisation of a narrative and an essayistic structure, for instance, provides an ongoing negotiation between fiction and nonfiction. Thus, the essayistic and the narrative elements are combined and the one counters the other. Woolf is achronological and

chronological at the same time and allows the coexistence of linear and nonlinear movement. The story progresses and pushes forwards, yet it also lingers and moves astray. Woolf thus both violates and adheres to generic standards, and the combination of two oppositional structures thus creates an alternative textual space where other contradictory discursive practices come about and merge. In the course of *A Room*, Woolf and her narrator occupy the position of an artist or novelist, journalist or critic, an academic or researcher. The uses of language and the modes of writing associated with these various positions are appropriated by Woolf, reworked, and commented on. Because different variants of writing are commonly thought of as both gendered and classified according to fiction and nonfiction, this merging dissolves the boundaries pertaining to language and gender while at the same time blurring the distinctions between fiction and nonfiction. This act reveals close connections between textuality and Woolf's rejection of authoritative positions and power structures. The refusal to stay within categories reflects a democratic inclination in the usage of textuality: one form, or structure, or discourse counters the other so that neither is allowed to occupy a dominant position. This finding is crucial for the claim that Woolf's argument is located in the textual composition of *A Room*.

As we have seen in the third chapter, the democratic tendency in *A Room* also comes to surface in Woolf's first-person narrator. Proceeding from the premise for my thesis, that *A Room* is a narrative, the discussion has centred on how the narrator's 'I' deconstructs the traditional dominant, monumental, and patriarchal first-person pronoun. Her means of positioning herself from a myriad of viewpoints and in relation to a number of subjects and objects portend her plasticity and ambiguity. The narrator is quite impossible to pin down because she occupies contradictory positions simultaneously. Due to her many constellations and configurations, the narrator is stable and unstable, static and dynamic, singular and multiple, individual and collective, real and fictive, anonymous and personified, and personal and impersonal. Because of the narrative composition and Woolf's deconstruction of the self, these dichotomies are never resolved into the one or the other. The 'I' thus achieves the feminist act of simultaneity. Similarly, Woolf occupies two irreconcilable positions at the same time and is both present and absent from her text. She takes on a democratic shape and avoids the 'the damned egotistical self'.

The democratic and antiauthoritarian underpinnings of the narrator's 'I', however, emerge above all through the presence of dialogue in the essay. Her voice guides the reader yet she also steps aside and let other voices interact. Here, Woolf's ability to bring other and opposing voices into to her own discourse proves to be decisive. This feature is inextricably

linked to the narrative form which constructs settings for conversation and interaction. In one of these Woolf provides a dialogue with patriarchy, its agents and institutions. Conflicting opinions on women are recorded and woven into the textual fabric in the voices of 'great men'. Based on the narrator's interest in questions and answers, Woolf problematises the notion of truth. Similarly, the narrator's 'I' also opens a double-layered discourse whereby the narrator engages in a discussion with herself. Because the narrator is associated with the many 'Maries' in the essay, the dialogue between these characters is also a construction of sibling selves addressing each other. This intersubjective dialogue adds to the deconstruction of the self as a stable and static entity. Accordingly, *A Room* also enacts a conversation of the self, where the self is enabled to address and manifest its many parts through dissolving the monumental 'I'.

But the narrator is also important for the manner in which *A Room* reads as a story. While the storyline exists as something solid the reader can rely on, the narrator functions as a seemingly stable and perceptible entity which guides the reading. In many ways the narrator also provides a mediation of the argument without the obstacles and interrupting or conflicting viewpoints that one may encounter in a third-person narrative. Seen thus, the narrator is a mediator with a clear communicative function. The perspectival limitations associated with first-person narratives restrict the reader's interaction with the text. Furthermore, this employment of perspective stabilises the reader's attention and guides it towards the argument.

Yet the narrator also positions herself amidst patriarchal norms and values in order to show how she is in conflict with reigning norms. In this manner she admits to her unreliability yet also gets the reader to trust her. In this sense, it is the reader and not only the narrator that scrutinises the norms of patriarchy. By trusting the narrator's assessment, the reader becomes involved in the argument presented in *A Room*. This narrative strategy is one of the ways in which the reader is welcomed into the essay and encouraged to participate. The strategies applied to gain the reader's trust cannot be separated from the way in which the reader interacts with the argument and is encouraged to form her or his own opinion. Crucially, the reader is also part of Woolf's audience in *A Room* and must always be deemed important. The reader's position in *A Room* thus reflects Woolf's investment in the common reader but also complicates the boundary between the text and the outside world.

The connection between the reader and the text also indicates a complex relationship between the different layers in the narrative and the various distinctions between fiction and reality. The sense of dialogue made possible by the essay's textual and narrative composition,

creates communication not only between agents in the storyworld but also involves communication across boundaries of fiction and narrative levels. The narrator's 'I' moves and fluctuates in the narrative: there is an 'I' on the extradiegetic level, on the intradiegetic level, and on the hypodiegetic level, but there are no obvious ways of separating them. The fusion of these voices subsumed under the first-person singular dissolves the boundaries commonly associated with narrative levels. Woolf thus dismantles the hierarchal structures, and her refusal to give precedence to one of these voices signifies a rejection of power structures. By locating this rejection in the narrative form, my analysis signifies how formal violations and experiments also evolve and enact Woolf's argument.

A related concluding point is that the partial dispersion of narrative levels further affects the relationship between fiction and reality as presented in the essay. In *A Room* fiction is referred to as true or real and the traditional conception of 'reality' is questioned and reworked. By working factual details into the fictional fabric, and fictional details into the factual, there is no easy method of distinguishing between the narrator's fictional story and Woolf's historical reality. With regards to narrative levels, this feature makes them transparent and the layers are fused and merged. The categories are destabilised and reinvented: fiction is reality and reality is fiction. By attracting the reader's attention to the representations of fictions and stories, Woolf suggests that 'reality' is also a mere rendition or a mental construct. This argument also signifies Woolf's celebration of the mind and its imaginings. The position fantasy occupies in *A Room* illustrates one imperative point: imagination and freedom of mind are indispensable concepts in a democratic world.

Thus, the connection between fiction and reality is crucial for the way in which Woolf gives power to the artist and suggests that the writer can capture reality better than any critic within the dominant tradition of historiography and any documentary mode of writing. This strain of my argument shows that, by relying on elements of fiction to present her argument, Woolf challenges common conceptions of knowledge and contributes to a relative epistemology. The fragments of fiction *might as well* be as true as the objective certainties and facts. Woolf questions the genres of factuality while also urging that they should include new actors and voices. Thus her position as an arguer in the essay is also affected by her position as a writer. Being a writer enables Woolf to use the modes of fiction to argue, entertain, provoke, and immerse the reader in different spheres of life. This notion is decisive for the way in which Woolf and *A Room* set forth a crucial connection between fiction and reality.

As chapter four has shown, immersing the reader in the experience of women is one of the crucial functions of both fragments of fiction and factual details. Through the germs of the lives of other women new storylines emerge, other details, personal, extraordinary, and even ordinary experiences become important. Woolf wants to materialise the experiences that are left unrecorded and suggests imagination as a partial remedy. She thus partially creates an alternative to the dominant mode of historiography where a new line of history emerges. From this perspective, *A Room* is a storyline where the lives of both fictional and real writers are presented. Beginning with the fictional Judith Shakespeare from the Elizabethan age, continuing throughout the nineteenth century, and winding up with the fictional author Mary Carmichael, Woolf repeatedly refers to women writers, potential writers, fictional writers, and their lives and experiences. And amongst these writers, Woolf herself emerges as a continuation and extension of the recorded and unrecorded past.

Woolf's strategy of writing herself into the alternative line of history is neither dominant, authoritative, nor in any way included in a way that makes her 'I' the sole focus of the text. Both imaginative and more factual moments become a merging of personal experience, historical setting and the argument. Events from her own life – regarding money, privacy, education, writing, and the public sphere – are transformed, reworked, reinvented, and Woolf's self and voice are only rendered anecdotally. Yet she is present. Despite her own and her narrator's insistence that the *A Room* is fictitious, the form, the generic categorisation, and contextual factors point to the presence of a 'personal Woolf'. This act, I conclude, becomes a vital part of the political message in *A Room*. Virginia Woolf writes herself into the discourse and into the public sphere but not in the conventional terms of the dominant tradition.

The way my analysis has focussed on the essay's narrative and essayistic structure, on the many functions of the narrator, and on the textual and contextual boundaries between fiction and reality attests to one conclusion which is, in fact, possible to make. On the basis of the analysis conducted in this thesis, the connections between text and politics in *A Room* are laid bare. Albeit a small contribution which leaves a myriad of possibilities open for further research, this analysis demonstrates and contributes to Moi's answer to Elaine Showalter: "the politics of Woolf's writing [is] *precisely in her textual practice*" (16). Woolf's violations of conventions of genre, language, and textuality cannot be separated from her criticising patriarchy and the question of a 'woman's sentence'. The notion of 'thinking back through our mothers' cannot be understood in isolation from the formal deconstruction of the boundaries between fiction, nonfiction, and the dominant traditions of patriarchy. Perhaps

even the argument of androgyny cannot be fathomed properly without taking the coexistence of opposing forms and structures into account. The 'room' in *A Room* is reflected through the alternative verbal and textual space which emerges from the clash of oppositions. The multiple voices at work in *A Room* also inhabit their own narrative spaces, where the narrator's 'I' does not interrupt. And the presence of a number of voices cannot and should not be disentangled from Woolf's perceptive (de)construction of the self, her play with personal pronouns and her own female subjectivity. One could. "But then one would have to decide what is style and what is meaning" (*AROO* 9).

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