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Mariana Muniz Pivanti

Making the Scene of Androgyny as *Écriture Féminine*

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre,ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Estudos de Literatura.

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Banca examinadora:

_____

Prof. Dr. Davi Ferreira de Pinho (Orientador)

Instituto de Letras – UERJ

_____

Profª. Dra. Fernanda Teixeira de Medeiros

Instituto de Letras – UERJ

_____

Profª. Dra. Flávia Trocoli Xavier da Silva

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

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DEDICATION

Dedico este trabalho à minha mãe, Ana Paula de Souza Muniz Pivanti.

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“It seems to me possible, perhaps desirable, that I may be the only person in this room who has committed the folly of writing, trying to write, or failing to write, a novel. And when I asked myself, as your invitation to speak to you about modern fiction made me ask myself, what demon whispered in my ear and urged me to my doom, a little figure rose before me—the figure of a man, or of a woman, who said, "My name is Brown. Catch me if you can."

Virginia Woolf

RESUMO

PIVANTI, Mariana Muniz. *Making the scene of androgyny as Écriture Féminine*. 2021. 97 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Letras) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2021.

Em diálogo com a crítica woolfiana, este estudo parte da questão modernista sobre a tradição para investigar de que maneira Virginia Woolf se alia mas também se destaca de seus contemporâneos, já que a escritora inglesa traz a questão de gênero e da escrita de mulheres para o contexto das experimentações com a forma que marcam sua geração. Por essa razão, em um segundo momento, pensaremos a escrita woolfiana em diálogo com a pensadora argelina Hélène Cixous, que também vê na escrita feminina, ou *écriture féminine*, uma forma de tensionar os limites da linguagem masculina. Por fim, em um terceiro momento, discorreremos sobre as afinidades e diferenças entre a proposta de uma mente e uma escrita andróginas em Woolf e o conceito de *écriture féminine* de Cixous.

Palavras-chave: Virginia Woolf. *Écriture Féminine*. Androginia.

ABSTRACT

PIVANTI, Mariana Muniz. *Making the scene of androgyny as Écriture Féminine*. 2021. 97 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Letras) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2021.

In a dialogue with Woolfian scholarship, this study departs from the modernist question of tradition in order to investigate how Virginia Woolf not only is connected to but also sets herself apart from her contemporaries, since the English writer brings the question of gender and of women's writing to the context of the modernist experimentations with form that characterise her generation. In this sense, in a second moment, we shall consider Woolf's writing in conversation with Algerian thinker Hélène Cixous, who also sees in feminine writing, or *écriture féminine*, a way of applying tension to the limits of masculine language. Lastly, in a third moment, we shall discuss the affinities and differences between the androgynous mind and writing that Woolf proposes and Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine.*

Keywords: Virginia Woolf. *Écriture Féminine*. Androgyny.

CONTENTS

SETTING THE SCENE

The present work shall investigate and elaborate on the notion of writing and fiction under the perspectives of modernist author Virginia Woolf and Algerian thinker Hélène Cixous in conversation with many other critical, philosophical and poetic voices. We shall focus our gaze on Woolf's ideas regarding literature, while Cixous's oeuvre will prove to be a valuable theoretical support for our main arguments. Indeed, these two women moved in quite different scenes, each playing a fundamental role within their historical contexts and projecting their voices onto ours. In chapter 1, Virginia Woolf appears on our stage in the first half of the twentieth century as one of the greatest writers of the modernist scene in England. Her way of thinking through writing takes on multitudinous forms, ranging from essays on literature, through feminist polemics, diaries and memoirs, to short stories and novels. The same can be said about Cixous, whose forms for thinking and imagining are also multifarious. Here, on our stage, in spite of other meaningful scenes she occupies as a playwright and a fictionist, she emerges in Chapter 2 as a professor, a philosopher, a key thinker writing in the 1970s in France in the scene of post-structuralist feminism. Although their contexts are far from being the same, we believe their ideas meet in many aspects. We shall argue that Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine* echoes Woolf's considerations on writing and fiction. This is so because, as we shall discuss further on, they both defended the feminine as a gateway for creating change and embracing difference, as opposed to a patriarchal perspective of exclusion and elimination of the *other*. In this sense, Woolf and Cixous advocate for a feminine writing, since it is the feminine that will challenge and dismantle the patriarchal system, or as Cixous puts it, the Phallocentric Performing Theatre. Likewise, Woolf identifies "the great patriarchal machine" in "A Sketch of the Past"(1976, p. 153) — that is, all the educational, political, and religious institutions that engender men and women — as that against which she positioned herself.

Therefore, we affirm the relevance of studying Woolf and Cixous since they both propose writing as a way of enacting change. Unlike the commonly diffused idea of literature and fiction as an escape from reality, we shall understand how feminine writing uses fiction as an electrifying medium for altering the status quo by introducing new perspectives, by challenging old patterns and by denouncing oppressive discourses. In other words, feminine writing undoes the dominant masculine performance in/of/through language in order to strike at the patriarchal system in the real world, as we shall unpack in detail throughout chapter 2.

Literature becomes, then, an effective and affective tool for the expression of multiple perspectives instead of the perpetuation of a dominant and exclusive one. As Woolf defends in "The Leaning Tower" (1940), "literature is no one's private ground; literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves" (n.p).

In this sense, we shall see that feminine writing does not participate in the phallocentric logic of masculine language. On the contrary, it reorganises language in what Woolf will identify as a feminine sentence, one that does not follow the masculine grammar that demands a subject to subordinate its object; a sentence that allows for digressions and repetitions, a true play with words and ideas. Then, as we reach chapter 3, we shall observe that the poetic impulse of feminine writing incorporates lyrical traits and inflections that blur the lines between prose and poetry. Indeed, as we set out to articulate, feminine writing is deeply rooted in poetic language, as philosopher Julia Kristeva demonstrates in her *La Révolution du Langage Poétique* (1974).

Virginia Woolf often repeats herself, creating choric phrases or scenes that she reiterates again and again within the same text in order to expand their meanings in new positions — a paradigmatic case for this study could be her refrain in "Craftsmanship" (1937): *for words do not live in the dictionary, they live in the mind*. This lyrical repetition, letting sound and positionality unpack unforeseen meanings, is one of the poetic inflections of *écriture féminine*, as Cixous would name it. In a way, this study adopts this form of meaningful repetition as its methodology, as we redirect and reiterate notions, scenes, or even quotes from essays such as *A Room of One's Own* (1929) again and again in the hope of allowing the traceof *écriture féminine* to leave its mark through these repetitions. Thus, on and again, we unpack Woolf's texts as they reemerge in new positions, in other conversations, renegotiating their meanings.

In the following chapters, we will endeavour to demonstrate that poetic fiction allows for the emergence of unconscious drives and feelings, bringing to light the deep recesses of the body's repressed desires. As a matter of fact, *the unconscious* and its variant *unconsciousness* are recurrent terms in this dissertation. A different study would need to perhaps delve into these terms and mediate their meanings between Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan (and their interpreters). Here, taking Cixous as an interpreter of psychoanalysis herself, we use these terms in relation to her understanding of the "unconscious" as the site within our psychic economy into which the feminine has been contained, suppressed, and indeed repressed — and Freud's return of the repressed becomes, in this sense, the return of

the feminine through writing (Cixous, 1974a; 1974b). Though we do not abandon psychoanalysis entirely, as Cixous's connection to Lacan will prove to be productive to our work, throughout this dissertation we stay closer to Cixous's own words.

What's more, the "unconscious mind" is also part of Woolf's critical vocabulary, and Woolf's writing stands centre stage in this dissertation. Woolf's relationship with Freud and psychoanalysis, however, is a very complex one. Although Woolf has stated in letters to have a "very amateurish knowledge of Freud and the psychoanalysts" (1932, n.p), scholar Nicky Platt reveals that Woolf was exposed to Freud's work at an early age through her father's male friends (2010, p. 156). Freud's influence on her life does not end there: many of her Bloomsbury friends, including her brother Adrian Stephen, who would become one of the first practicing psychoanalysts in London, and husband Leonard Woolf, among others, were keen readers of the Austrian psychoanalyst, and have discussed his ideas with her (with Virginia Woolf often being their antagonist). Furthermore, in 1924, Freud's works were published in English by the Hogarth Press, Leonard and Virginia Woolf's publishing house, and, when Freud moved to London, the Woolfs met with and were very impressed by him (PLATT, 2010, p. 156). Platt believes, however, that Woolf herself would only have seriously read Freud towards the late 1930s by the time she was writing *Between the Acts* (1941) – then, still titled *Pointz Hall* – and "A Sketch of the Past" (2010, p. 157 – 158). As Platt notes, and as Woolf herself indicates in essays such as "Freudian Fiction" (1920), Woolf was averse to adopting a psychoanalytic point of view since she was deeply skeptical of psychoanalytical approaches to fiction, which were, for her, too deterministic and reductive. For Woolf, "'characters' should not be 'cases' in fiction, to be examined by the kind of bullying (male) doctors to whom her own ill health had made her subject" (PLATT, 2010, p. 157). Conflicting as her relationship with the psychoanalysis of her time may be, Woolf's use of the "unconscious" seems to be in sync with Cixous's rereading of Freud and (or with) Lacan, and, though we shall not adopt either a particularly Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalytical interpretation in the following discussions, we will employ these critical terms — the *unconscious* and *unconsciousness* — as we follow the scenes of these women writers.

As we reach chapter 3, we shall redirect our discussions of the Phallocentric Performing Theatre and its grammar, of the feminine unconscious, and of the feminine sentence and its poetics, towards Woolf's tentative suggestion for bringing change through writing: her androgynous turn. We embrace Woolf's argument as a feminist position since it is androgynous writing and its allowance for all kinds of subjectivities to emerge that will break, even if only momentarily, the primacy of phallologocentric order. If literature is indeed

a common ground, it seems to be the return of the feminine through writing that opens a gateway to the androgynous mind, thus establishing this very ground, this revolutionary place, this enchanted stage, where multitudes can thrive: fiction.

1 VIRGINIA WOOLF IN THE MODERNIST SCENE

> It is an age of fragments. A few stanzas, a few pages, a chapter here and there, the beginning of this novel, the end of that, are equal to the best of any age or author. But can we go to posterity with a sheaf of loose pages, or ask the readers of those days, with the whole of literature before them, to sift our enormous rubbish heaps for our tiny pearls? Such are the questions which the critics might lawfully put their companions at table, the novelists and poets.
>
> *Virginia Woolf*

Literary modernism escapes steady definitions, for the period we refer to when we speak of modernist literature is marked by contrasts and complexities that are not easily reconciled. Thus, defining modernism is no easy task. As modernist scholar Jane Goldman affirms in *Modernism, 1910 – 1945: Image to Apocalypse* (2004), choosing any historical period within which to place modernism is somewhat arbitrary. However, for the purpose of this study, we accept Goldman's frame, 1910 to 1945, for it encompasses what some critics called the High Modernism of the 1920s as well as the Political 30s (2004, p. XV) while implicating one in the other and thus undoing the illusory division between a purely aesthetic or formalist moment and an openly political one. In Goldman's work, the formal investigations and the political interventions of modernist texts are seen as an aesthetic response to a prolonged period of cultural and sociopolitical upheaval which was deeply marked by the eruption of two World Wars and a Communist revolution, besides the rise of the feminist, socialist, and workers' rights movements in Britain. Following Goldman (2004, p. 3), we shall not perceive modernism here as a unified and homogenised movement, pertaining to a particular *zeitgeist*, but as a diverse and complex urge to challenge traditional concepts of art and literature within a historical context of deep cultural change.

It is no wonder, then, that such a period would produce writers who engaged with thinking the very structure of literary making itself and its effects on society. Essay writing and reading become, then, as Goldman informs us (2004), chief forms of literary expression and engagement. Thus, we shall take a closer look at important essays of the period, such as Ezra Pound's "How to read" (1931), T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the individual talent" (1919) and Virginia Woolf's "Modern Fiction" (1925) and "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown" (1924),

among others, which bring forth an analysis of the writing of the period as well as a fictionalisation of their own work. This research shall dive into Woolf's oeuvre in order to delimit how she inserts herself in the modernist scene and how she further expands her contemporaries' discussion by bringing the question of gender to the forefront of her discussion of genre. In this sense, even though some important critics and philosophers, such as Georg Lúkacs, consider "modernism" to be too abstract and politically irresponsible in its formalist drive, we follow theorists like Ann Banfield, Jane Goldman, Jessica Berman, Hermione Lee, Michael Whitworth, Geoff Gilbert, Davi Pinho and others as we understand Woolf's modernist scene as a deeply interventionist and avant-garde moment. Modernism, after all, can only be understood as a critique of modernity as a project — and this is of particular interest to the Virginia Woolf reader, as she constantly critiques bourgeois gender constructions and their psychological, political and aesthetic effects.

1.1 **"On or about December 1910, human character changed"**

In a 1924 essay, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", Woolf declared that "on or about December 1910, human character changed" (n.p). Woolf seems to be retrospectively assessing the formative years of a modernist impulse, for her dates, from 1910 to 1924, when the essay is published, allow us to link modernism to many social and political upheavals caused in art and literature. Major events in Western History took place within these fourteen years, such as the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Bolshevik revolution and the subsequent execution of the Russian Imperial family in 1918, while the seeds of Nazism and Fascism began to grow in Italy, Spain, and a war-destroyed Germany. Moreover, Britain's very position as an Empire was being challenged as the Indian Independence Movement gained momentum. So, as the old order of the world seemed to be declining faster, so did the certitude and the unshakable belief in universal notions of truth and progress, which prepared the field not only for human character to change but also for a decisive shift in the way artists expressed themselves, as Goldman affirms:

> Wherever the emphasis falls for individual practitioners or movements, it is clear that in the period 1910 to 1945, a period of two cataclysmic wars, and of massive social upheaval and major political revolution, the very categories of Art and Literature, as eternal, transcendent values, were under considerable assault and

> transition, undermined by a wide range of oppositional, avant-garde movements (2004, p. 39).

Indeed, as scholar Jessica Berman defends, after World War I, people's sense of cohesive community was challenged by the divisive forces propelled by war violence. She evokes philosopher Walter Benjamin's idea that the exchange of experience became damaged after the suffering of war, which impaired people's ability to tell stories (2001, n.p). What would result, then, from a fragmented era could only be fragmented stories. According to Berman,

> Fragmentation seems intrinsic to modernist narrative. We recognize fragmented voices and fragmented identities as hallmarks of what has been called 'high modernist' writing, whether we speak of their resolution into alternate patterns of meaning or dissolution in the crisis of the subject (2001, n.p).

Therefore, the literature that results from modernism is one deeply conscious of the fragility of modern institutions. For the modernists, the mere depiction of reality would not do anymore since a teleological (or realist, as some would call it) approach to art would be unable to capture their chaotic times, marked by interruptions and new beginnings. In order to convey the mind of the fragmented subject created by that tumultuous age, then, modernist writers would often resort to unconventional techniques of writing, such as, for example, a non-linear narrative, which would, in turn, challenge the concept of time itself and the sense of history as progress. As Woolfian scholar Michael H. Whitworth considers, "Modernism was sceptical of the liberal ideology of progress, and its literary experiments with time undermined the linear temporality essential to an idea of progress" (2000, p. 108).

Furthermore, Woolf's choice to narrow the starting point of the modernist scene to December 1910 may indicate she had in mind the exhibition curated by art critic and Woolf's close friend Roger Fry, which opened precisely in November 1910. Fry's *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* shocked British audiences, or, in the words of Desmond MacCarthy, it represented a true "assault" on the academic and traditional views of art held dearly by British art critics (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 42). Firstly, the Post-Impressionist exhibition brought to the core of English intellectual society the shocking colours and strange forms of French artists such as Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin and Manet himself, who was, according to Fry's aesthetic theory, the early influence for Post-Impressionist techniques. Furthermore, it introduced the French avant-garde to England, placing contemporary artists such as Picasso and Matisse alongside established names of Impressionism. As woolfian scholar Davi Pinho explains,

> Such an exhibition caused an uproar for different reasons. It was a French collection for an audience that loved Turner; a collection that claimed to be *post* Monet, Renoir and Degas when such impressionists were still in their productive years; besides, it was a collection that adopted Cézanne as one of the founding fathers of the new movement (…) (2015, p. 61)[1].

The reactionary critics of the period considered the paintings exhibited in Fry's spectacle to be barbaric and uncivilised, depicting strange figures in "unnatural colours" (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 43). But, perhaps, one of the greatest accomplishments of Post-Impressionism – and one of Fry's criteria to classify a piece of art as Post-Impressionist – was its depiction of the object itself, delimited by hard geometrical lines and solid forms (PINHO, 2015, p. 62), which would evoke fantastical figures that appealed to the subjective perspective of each viewer rather than a life-like representation of a "real" object. Perception and subjective interpretations become the heart of such artistic endeavours, and not plastic representations as was the customary tradition in the British galleries up to that point. In this sense, visual art begins to exert a growing influence on the literature of the time, as we shall further analyse when we discuss Bloomsbury aesthetics. Thus, when we add the groundbreaking visual arts introduced by Fry's exhibition to the boiling political moment in England, we begin to understand the context of cultural change that would produce some of the controversial and innovative literary works of modernism.

It is possible to observe a modernist impulse to reopen, challenge and redefine the once stable concepts upon which Western civilisation was erected. As a result, modernist texts critique modern ideas of objective truth, chronological time, philosophical reason and liberal notions of progress. It is expected, then, that a movement that tends to confuse and question definitions becomes itself difficult to define. Within the semantics of the term *modernist,* we may find a myriad of different interpretations, and perhaps, it might be interesting and even more productive to investigate the diverse approaches to the meaning of modernism rather than to homogenise it under the sign of "the new"[2], that is, a total break with the art of the past, or as a purely aesthetic moment, two of the most common misconceptions attributed to such a heterogeneous period.

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[1]Tal exposição causou um alvoroço por diversos motivos. Era uma coleção francesa para um público apaixonado por Turner; uma coleção que se dizia *pós* Monet, Renoir e Degas, quando tais impressionistas ainda estavam em seus anos produtivos; e também era uma coleção que adotava Cézanne como um dos pais desse movimento (...).

[2]As in Ezra Pound's urge to "make it new" as if it were truly possible to forego "the old".

If we follow Goldman's observations, it becomes clear that there is an intersection between the terms *modernism, postmodernism,* and *avant-garde,* since they all seem to employ art and aesthetics to respond to the social upheavals of their times. Goldman explores the diverse semantic accouterment of these terms within critical discussions and elucidates how definitions may vary depending on divergent contexts and their critical tendencies. Goldman clarifies that

> At stake in this shifting semantic terrain between the critical terms, modernism and postmodernism, avant-garde and neo-avant-garde, is the positioning and interpretation of the art of 1910 to 1945 in relation to politics, history, culture and aesthetics. 'Postmodernism', a term invented and gaining currency, along with 'Modernism', around the mid-century mark, has developed a number of theorised readings of Modernism which seem to confuse as much as clarify, leaving modernism bound up with postmodernism wrangling (2004, p. 8).

Michael H. Whitworth further complicates the matter by declaring that some have found similarities between *modernism* and *postmodernism* by dismissing the New Critics' interpretation of modernism as primitivist and alienated from its contemporary issues. While his point is not to homogenise modernism's and postmodernism's political impulses, he notes that modernism's interventionist and confrontational propositions may lead critics to read a continuation (rather than a break) betweenmodernist and postmodernist scenes. Thus, the definition of modernism seems to become even more diverse and plural:

> Many other early twentieth-century texts were revalued in the light of postmodernism, and the revaluative movement had unintended consequences: the discovery that modernism seemed to contain postmodernism in embryo only served to undermine the force of the distinction between the two movements, and thus to dissolve the basis of the revaluation. A re-assessment of neglected works by Woolf's contemporaries drew attention to writing which was experimental but which conformed neither to the New Critical ideal of modernism, nor to the paradigm of postmodernism. The rehabilitation of modernism was made possible in part by the discovery of the plurality of modernisms (WHITWORTH, 2000, p. 109).

As we move the discussion forward, we may notice that the connection between *modernism* and the *avant-garde* may prove to be even more complex. The term *avant-garde* has its roots in military vocabulary. It is a French word that designates the troops that would come first in the battlefield. Towards the end of the 19th century, as Jane Goldman annotates, the term began to be applied to art in order to define deeply socialist artistic expressions, thus sending shock waves and interventions into the fabric of daily life (2004, p. 7). However, after the end of World War II, the first critics that began to study and revise the periodproceeded to associate *avant-garde* with *modernism* itself, and both became

synonymous with self-reflexive art. Therefore, *avant-garde* and *modernism* were seen as practically the same, both representing *l'art pour l'art* – or art for art's sake –, that is, an art totally removed from the praxis of life, an evasion and oblivion through aesthetics that informs the very definition of the so-called *High Modernist* moment (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 7-8). The fact that Anglophone critics that emerged after World War II relied on the aesthetic and self-reflexive aspect of modernism as the avant-garde in order to differentiate the art being produced in English at the time from the politically engaged art that came from the USSR reveals how the ideology of the Cold War interfered with critical efforts of defining modernism. For, if avant-garde, in Cold-War criticism, came to signify "(merely) to be at the cutting edge of art, forging new aesthetics, breaking with – indeed violating – aesthetic tradition while celebrating a release into aesthetic oblivion", becoming thus "synonymous with its earlier antonym, *l'art pour l'art*" (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 11), this is not the whole picture of modernism.

After all, avant-garde techniques, such as the juxtaposition of images, collage and mosaic stemming from Cubism and other art movements of the time – whichwould come to be reproduced through literary texts – were perceived as ways of deconstructing traditional modes of visual arts and traditional forms of realist narratives. Furthermore, there were many European avant-garde movements of the period that defended the avant-gardeas an interventionist and even violent form of art making. Movements like Dadaism and Futurism believed that art should erase the boundaries between art and life and provoke real and meaningful disruptions in daily life in order to make their point of rearranging the current state of society (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 12). Their performances, filled with militaristic references, often incurred in violence and shocked the general public. According to Goldman,

> Avant-garde movements not only dealt in an (anti-)aesthetic of violent intervention; they also, on occasion, incurred violence. Futurist and Dadaist exhibitions and performances frequently attracted or incurred violent attacks, whether from outraged audiences or police raids (2004, p. 15).

Thus, Goldman traces back the shifting critical terrain around the terms "avant-garde" and "modernism"when she considers that the aesthetics of the avant-garde could be "considered at the least transgressive, if not dissident", while modernist aesthetics, "even under the postmodernist auspices, are at the most perhaps transgressive" (2004, p. 9).

Indeed, many critics throughout the XX century read modernist literary works as if their writers were removed from their own historical time, unable to engage with the social issues that permeated the age. Modernist scholar Geoff Gilbert elaborates in his *Before*

Modernism Was (2004) that thinkers like the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács met modernism's flight of the unconscious and predilection for impressions and fragmented, subjective perceptions with skepticism. According to Gilbert, Lukács believed modernist writers to be too abstract and to reject their objective reality by neglecting and avoiding a social and political project, which meant, for the philosopher, that modernism was nothing but an obtuse form of liberal ideology with no real transformative impact in the history of the world (2004, p. 12). Gilbert seems to agree with the affirmation that there is a level of abstraction when it comes to modernist texts as he declares that "Modernism has only the power of fitful imagination: it is neither constant nor material in its making of the world" (2004a, p. 11). However, we may understand that modernism's abstraction and evasion of objective reality comes not from escapism or from the lack of social engagement, but from the fact that modernists understood that traditional forms only perpetuated the very social struggles from which they would be accused of trying to escape. For them, the realist literature that had been produced up to that point did not have the means to grasp and convey the difficulties that sprung from such a convoluted and chaotic age. Therefore, modernism's "abstraction" seemed only to be a different appraisal of reality and a reaction against accepted modes of living and producing art (and, in this sense, it is not an abstraction at all). Thus, we agree with Gilbert when he reassesses Lukács:

> I want to resist Lukács conclusions, that modernism is not part of the work of history because it is an ideology and a pathology, I also want to recognise something in this insight. Lukács is useful in noting that there is a kind of writing which has a problem with its relation to the lifeworld and the public sphere, and that this problem issued at once in a vision of the impossibility of 'literature as such', and in a difficulty of living (2004, p. 14).

What Gilbert learns while confronting Lukács is that if modernist literature did not seek unified action or present solutions for its time (becoming, in this sense, ineffective artistic enterprises for Lukács, for example) it was, however, deeply concerned with affecting future world orders and, thus, with reshaping history itself (2004, p. XI). We may affirm, then, that modernist writing operates within the realm of possibility, creating alternatives for a deferred future that is still open to interpretation. As Gilbert puts it, to write "the counterfactual", "things which are fated not to happen" (2004, p. XII), signifies that modernist writing is deeply rooted in material concerns. The author borrows modernist writer Robert Musil's concept of a *sense of possibility*, which represents an "implausible persistence, a way of living and writing, in relation to a prospect that does not obey the laws of the world"

(2004, p. XI), as opposed to the *sense of reality*, which operates within the concrete and fixed manifestations of objective reality, of life as one knows it, describing rather than reopening this life/reality to possible reshapings. Writing merely through a *sense of reality* binds art to a fixed present. Writing with a *sense of possibility* in mind, however, does not mean to evade the fabric of daily life. As Robert Musil declares in *The Man without Qualities* (1943), writing the possible refers not to a mere fantasy of the future, but to embed life with a sense of hope, an impulse to build and to create; it has to do with a "conscious utopianism that does not shrink from reality but sees it as a project, something yet to be invented. After all, the earth is not that old, and was apparently never so ready as now to give birth to its full potential" (MUSIL *apud* GILBERT, 2004, p. XII).

In this sense, we may affirm that modernist "abstraction" is at the same time "material" as it mobilises subjective perceptions in order to negotiate what constitutes "the possible" and "the future". By reframing the possible, then, modernist texts are not reduced to their contexts, for their mode of narrativity demands that their meanings be continuously negotiated by readers in other presents and futures. This is what Gilbert tells us when he turns Lukács's idea of "abstraction" on its head. He disagrees with Lukács's idea that "Possibility, the dream of a new world, modernist fiction, are all only abstract. They have no real presence in the world because they cannot define personality, or determine development, and as such, they remain totally subjective (…)" (2004, p. 13).

When it comes to the modernist writer this dissertation aims at discussing, Virginia Woolf, we can affirm that she was not only aware of her age's complexities and contradictions but that she also actively engaged with visions of new social orders. In a 1923 essay, "How it strikes a contemporary", Woolf comments on the intense cultural changes of the period, and how literature translated them. By reading the literature produced in her own time and defending it against critics who belittled it when compared to the literature of the past, she anticipates present day critics like Goldman and Gilbert as she declares that the texts of her time rely on fleeting, subjective impressions and suggestions rather than on accepted reality in order to capture the "transitory splendours" of her times. She teasingly affirms that

> … our contemporaries afflict us because they have ceased to believe. The most sincere of them will only tell us what it is that happens to himself. They cannot make a world, because they are not free from other human beings. They cannot tell stories because they do not believe that stories are true. They cannot generalise. They depend on their senses and emotions, whose testimony is trustworthy, rather than on their intellects whose message is obscure (1923, n.p).

As Gilbert would affirm years after her, Woolf also believed that modernist writing was indeed meant to create the possible through fiction instead of having a complete, fixed meaning in its own time. For her, fiction was rather bound to find its constituency in the future to come. She had no intention of creating coherent masterpieces to be analysed and celebrated by critics. Instead, she seemed to understand modernist texts to be an opening to different worlds — both her world and time and worlds and times to come. In "How it Strikes a Contemporary" (1923), Woolf clarifies the relation between writing fiction and creating different possibilities:

> Their poems, plays, biographies, novels are not books but notebooks, and Time, like a good schoolmaster, will take them in his hands, point to their blots and scrawls and erasions, and tear them across; but he will not throw them into the waste-paper basket. He will keep them because other students will find them very useful. It is from the notebooks of the present that the masterpieces of the future are made (1923, n.p).

1.2. "**The proper stuff of fiction"**

Besides writing poems, novels and plays, modernist authors also engaged in producing critical and theoretical works in the form of essays and manifestos. Through these pieces, they would produce literary critiques and sometimes postulate what they understood to be the desirable way to write artistically. While essays evoked more general opinions on diverse subjects involving life and art, manifestos assumed a more straightforward approach to aesthetic guidelines – as in the well-known Futurist and Expressionist manifestos, prominent avant-garde movements of the time. Although Virginia Woolf never signed a manifesto herself, we may take her essays on writing as some sort of open-ended and temporary manifestos of her own. For, unlike many manifestos which informed the aesthetic foundations for different modernisms, Woolf did not engage in postulating dos and don'ts when it came to writing. This does not mean, however, that she refrained from expressing her views on writing and literature. On the contrary, Woolf established a "conversational method" (PINHO, 2020, p. 13) in her essays which puts forth her take on literature, art and life without the authoritative tone displayed in manifestos and critical essays circulating in the "little magazines" of the time (GOLDMAN, 2004). According to Pinho, "Woolf's essays stage

various voices that do not aspire to the truth of the argument" (2020, p. 13). In this sense, by assuming the conversational method, Woolf refuses to identify herself as a theoretician, since "the antidote for the authority of theory is the conversation"[3] (PINHO, 2020, p. 14). Thus, by not assuming a hierarchised authorial and authoritative voice, Woolf liberates herself from postulations and refuses the labels of either a theoretician of literature or a member of a unified movement, placing herself in a perpetual conversation that uses fiction as its mode of thinking in common (and fighting collectively) (PINHO, 2020, p. 11).

As Jane Goldman informs us, modernist writers made the essay and the manifesto important forums for public debate. Due to the circulation of the so-called "little magazines" — like T. S. Eliot's *Egoist* (1914-1919), Wyndham Lewis's *Blast* (1914-1915) and Eugene Jola's *Transition* (1927-1938), to name a few —, essays and manifestos became a prevalent practice of the modernist debate on the possibilities and impossibilities of literary genres, becoming themselves difficult texts to categorise. As Goldman affirms,

> Such self-conscious complication of categorization too is a vital component of the art of the period: manifestos, critical commentaries, aesthetic manuals and guides abound to the point where we come to see such documents as 'embodying rather than explicating the aesthetic gesture of the new – even while exploding the very category of the aesthetic' (2004, p. 5).

Thus, even though essay writing was already a well-established practice (and Woolf was herself a keen reader of Montaigne, for instance), it became a privileged site for immediate debate on and production of "the new". In her first *Common Reader* (1925), Woolf collected some of her contributions to this public debate in the form of essays, which included an essay on Montaigne. She further explores the matter in "The Modern Essay" (1921), also collected in *The Common Reader, volume 1*, in which she retraces the history and the difference in styles of essay writing from Socrates to prominent eighteenth and nineteenth-century essayists like Charles Lamb, Walter Pater, Mark Pattinson, Samuel Butler and her own father, Leslie Stephen. Here, Woolf proposes that essays should primarily evoke pleasure in their readers, and that the essay, too, should be receptive "to boldness and metaphor" (1921, p. 18). The point Woolf seems to stress in "The Modern essay" (1921), then, is that "Literal truth-telling and finding fault with a culprit for his [Mark Pattinson's] good are out of place in an essay, where everything should be for our good and rather for eternity rather than for the March number of the Fortnightly Review" (1921, p. 16).

[3] "Os ensaios de Woolf encenam várias vozes que não se direcionam a uma verdade do argumento"; "o antídoto para o lugar de autoridade da teoria é a conversa".

In order to understand modernist attempts to define "the proper stuff of fiction", as Virginia Woolf would suggest in "Modern fiction" (1919/1925), we can quickly turn to a few key essays and manifestoes that mediated and embodied the modernist public debate. When studying modernist writers, we inevitably come across Ezra Pound's injunction to "Make it new", for instance, since it embodies the modernist drive to reevaluate tradition. It titles Pound's 1934 essay collection *Make it new,* in which he postulates directions on how to bring forth this "new" kind of literature. "Make it new", then, became a jingoistic slogan. Dating back to imagist manifestoes, the focus of "making it new" should be that of conveying powerful images in a few nouns in order to create an aesthetic effect, rather than relying on adjectives or any sort of affectation in poetry (which, in prose, becomes analogous to long descriptions in 19th-century fashion). In this sense, Pound believed the poet should eliminate superfluous words and focus upon the thing itself, that is, the concept or idea he or she wishes to convey.[4]

In "How to read" (1931), Pound identifies what he calls the "three kinds of poetry", which are modes or registers in language a skilled poet should strive to achieve (p. 25). The first one mentioned in Pound's essay is "Melopoeia", which refers to the musical, or melodic qualities of the words chosen to compose the poem. The second is "Phanopoeia", and it refers to the visual images cast upon readers' minds, which are to be evoked through the words of the poem. Finally, he introduces "Logopoeia", which is the verbal play in the poem that creates meaning outside the common usage of words (p. 26-27). Although Pound defends that the three properties are pivotal for the construction of a good poem, we may affirm that the period's interest in the use and juxtaposition of images in literature as a means to differentiate themselves from past literary traditions poses a fundamental emphasis upon the phanopoeic quality of the poem. According to Jane Goldman,

> All three modes are important in the period, and Pound's esteemed logopoeia is certainly illuminating in its endorsement of pleasuring the intellect, and actually enjoying the negotiation of densely allusive, difficult texts. But in this period, there is a pronounced interest, nevertheless, in the development of phanopoeic writing, not only in terms of the 'imagery' of Imagism, say, but also in terms of the visual dimensions of verbal, particularly where the visual form of writing, and the materiality of the printed word, become vitally celebrated poetic components (2004, p. 11).

[4] Even though Pound and Woolf are pondering upon different genres, since, with his Imagism, Pound is thinking in terms of poetry, while Woolf is engaged with fiction in a broader, artistic sense, they are both interested in genre inflections and in thinking "the thing itself", though this "thing" will differ between them, as we shall see.

Nevertheless, making it new in writing, if we turn to another key moment in this public debate, does not mean a total break with the past or a disregard for tradition, but rather an assimilation and transformation of what already existed. This is T. S. Eliot's point in "Tradition and the individual talent" (1919), one of the most fundamental essays of modernist and formalist criticism. It provides a critical vocabulary for the relationship between the individual artist and a larger context in which he or she is inserted. Throughout the essay, we may observe how Eliot proceeds to create a parallel between artistic processes and science in an impulse to transform literary criticism into an autonomous discipline capable of producing knowledge (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 80). He uses his critical apparatus towards theorising and developing what he calls an "Impersonal theory" (1919, p. 39), an aesthetics that encourages the surrender of the poets' personalities so they can be a receptacle for the dead poets of the past.

Eliot begins by declaring that individual poets must not consider their art as a separate production, independent of literary tradition and criticism. On the contrary, poets must see themselves as constituting a continuous tradition of dead and living poets. In this sense, modern and past poets "conform", that is, form together, the literary canon. Jane Goldman is critical of Eliot's approach as she declares that he "seems to sanction continuity rather than rupturing of, the past; and his only sense of collective is in the placing of a solitary living practitioner 'among the dead'" (2004, p. 87). Indeed, as Eliot advocates for "an ideal order" (1919, p. 37), he defends that the creation of "the new" does not come from a break with the past, but rather from the acknowledgement and repositioning of tradition. In his own words,

> Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order (1919, p. 37).

Eliot thus sees tradition as the foundation for the new literature modernists put forth, and in this reworking of tradition into new orders and combinations, modernist texts would continue to offer fragments for a literary tradition of the future. However, as we navigate through Eliot's essay, it is possible to notice that his idea of a canon of dead poets includes very few names. When he considers this "simultaneous order" of dead poets, he has in mind a predominantly male and European canon which is deeply connected to the notion of

nationalism, since he opens the essay by stating the differences between English and French critical perceptions. Goldman proposes that:

> Eliot frames the relationship of individual talent to tradition first in nationalistic terms: the 'private mind' of the individual is to submit to 'the mind of his own country', which in turn is a microcosm of 'the mind of Europe', in which are suspended Shakespeare, Homer and primitive cave drawings (2004b, p. 94).

Therefore, Eliot's idea of order, tradition and the canon might perpetuate dominant cultural standards and, consequently, the devaluation of non-Eurocentric or women's literatures. As a matter of fact, Virginia Woolf would notice the predominance of male writers in Eliot's understanding of tradition in many of her essays, and especially in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), as we shall further analyse when we discuss Woolf's feminist difference in relation to her modernist contemporaries.

Eliot's main arguments in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) revolve around what he calls an "impersonal theory" (p. 39). According to him, in order to be a continuous interlocutor of tradition, the poet should relinquish his or her personal identity so to receive the collective impressions coming from the "the mind of Europe" and from "his own country" (ELIOT, 1919, p. 38), or as Goldman sardonically puts it, "the poet here is figured as a spiritual medium, or ventriloquist's dummy, for a past tradition of dead, but not quite dead or better, undead – poets" (2004, p. 98). For Eliot, the poet's personality would hinder the ability of capturing and expressing the right feelings and emotions. According to him, "the poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together" (1919, p. 40). Woolf also sees a predominant authorial personality (or identity) as dangerous (as we shall further analyse), but she offers fiction as the ultimate antidote in order to create a self that veils or shades the author's. In "The Modern Essay" (1921), she ponders upon the balance between personality and impersonality as she discusses the essayist, biographer and novelist Max Beerbohm, whom she praises precisely for having displayed this fictionalised personality in his essays:

> He has brought personality into literature, not unconsciously and impurely, but so consciously and purely that we do not know whether there is any relation between Max the essayist and Mr. Beerbohm the man. We only know that the spirit permeates every word that he writes. The triumph is the triumph of style. For it is only by knowing how to write that you can make use in literature of your self; that self which, while essential to literature, is also its most dangerous antagonist. Never to be yourself and yet always – that is the problem (1921, p. 20).

As we see in the quote above, Woolf is aware of the dangers of personality in a writer, but the poet – or artist – for her is far from being, as Goldman puts it, a "ventriloquist's dummy" for the past.

Virginia Woolf's "Modern Novels" was published in 1919, around the same time Eliot published his "Tradition and the Individual Talent", and was then revised and republished in *The Common Reader*, in 1925, as "Modern Fiction". Throughout the essay, Woolf defends the idea that there is more to life, and consequently, to fiction, than the mechanical description of daily events. In one of her most quoted passages, she declares that "life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (1919, n.p). Although this passage indeed represents an important argument for Woolfian thinking, early criticism erroneously read it as if Woolf were defending a more transcendental point of view towards life, unlike some of the concrete approaches to fiction practiced by the generations before her. If we accompany that thought we might be led to believe that she vows for an "essential thing", or a "spirit" that surpasses the material aspect of life. However, if we read her essay carefully, we understand that Woolf is actually moving towards a kind of fiction that embraces both spiritualist and materialist aspects of life, as we shall further discuss when we analyse her depiction of Mrs. Brown.

Just as Eliot had declared in his "Tradition and the individual talent" that the mind of the poet is like a "shred of platinum" that receives the "particles" from the outside world (1919, p. 40), one that absorbs and assimilates the impressions it receives, Woolf also affirms the importance of receiving such impressions and letting them sink into the unconscious in order to grasp life in its multiplicity. Woolf, like Eliot did, also employs "alchemical imagery to describe the processing of the atoms or particles that fall" in this new kind of writing (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 148), as we see *In:*

> Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small (WOOLF, 1919, n.p).

In "Modern Novels" (1919) and its revised version "Modern Fiction" (1925)[5], Woolf again identifies the Edwardian writers Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy, as

[5]In the 1925 revision that came to be "Modern Fiction" Woolf inserts a response that contradicts Eliot's defence of James Joyce's "mythical method", which he develops in "Ulysses, order and myth" (1923), (see GOLDMAN, 2004, p.72).

materialists: “if we tried to formulate our meaning in one word we should say that these three writer are materialists. It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us (…)” (1925, n.p). Moreover, Woolf defends her generation of writers, the Georgians, as spiritualists, since they were concerned with capturing the ineffable quality of life, unlike the Edwardians. Although she takes her contemporaries’s side on the matter, Woolf’s essay does not stop at the “spiritualist” impulse of her generation, which is merely a step in another direction[6]. Furthermore, we may affirm that Woolf herself does not fit into the moulds of a “spiritualist”. Woolf criticises the Edwardians for their overly “materialist” fiction, in the sense of being merely descriptive of the material world, and praises the Georgians for their “spiritual” approach, in the sense of their attempt to capture the unconscious mind behind appearances, but the author herself reveals both aspects in her own fiction, in which she never denies nor refuses historical and narratological processes. Indeed, in the famous passage of “Modern Fiction” (1925) she certainly expresses the ineffable “luminous halo” in fiction, but without forgetting the “gig lamp” that produces it (WOOLF, 1925, n.p).

She further expands her analysis on Edwardians and Georgians in a 1924 essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”, in which she focuses her critical view on Arnold Bennett, who had recently criticised her and the writers of the time in terms of character building, drawing, as Woolf affirms, “the conclusion that we have no young novelists of first-rate importance at the present moment, because they [the modernists] are unable to create characters that are real, true and convincing” (1924, n.p).

Although Woolf does not consistently identify herself and her contemporaries as modernists – after all, the term would gain notoriety after World War II – she was aware there was an acute difference between them, or the “moderns”, as she termed her contemporaries, and the former generation of writers (WHITWORTH, 2000, p. 108). She dedicates “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924) to analysing this difference, which she identifies as the mechanical description of reality of the Edwardians and the focus on the subjective processes practiced by the Georgians. According to Woolf, the Edwardians “were never interested in character itself; or in the book itself. They were interested in something outside. Their books, then, were incomplete as books, and required that the reader should finish them, actively and practically, for himself” (1924, n.p).

[6]Here, it is important to observe the movement in Woolf’s essay: she praises the spiritualists but she does not identify herself as one of them. She does not stop at the “luminous halo” argument, but she rather sees “spiritualist writing” as an attempt (and a failure, at times), not an end in itself.

Thus, not to be "interested in the character itself", for Woolf, meant that the Edwardians would concentrate on the description of tangible and external details rather than on the character's subjective negotiations and sensorial feelings. When discussing Bennett's *Hilda Lessways* (1911), Woolf points out that the reader never sees Hilda herself; the reader never dives into her unconscious and therefore, never gets to know her deepest yearnings, dreams, tribulations or, in that sense, who she is. On the contrary, what the reader gets from the book is an overall description of Hilda's surroundings and Hilda's society, or what Bennett would defend as reality. In this sense, Woolf is questioning the definition of reality itself: "But now I must recall what Mr. Arnold Bennett says. He says that is only if the characters are real that the novel has any chance of surviving. Otherwise, die it must. But, I ask myself, what is reality? And who are the judges of reality?" (1924, n.p).

The Georgians – or as she names them, "Mr. Forster, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Strachey, Mr. Joyce and Mr. Eliot" (1924, n.p) — treat reality and character building entirely differently. Their description of a real character is based upon perceptions, impressions and emotions that bring to page characters' inner lives and their individual and personal relationships to the environment. It demonstrates how the Georgians viewed reality as a matter of subjective constructions that are, in themselves, already culturally negotiated. In this sense, to compare these different approaches to character and reality, Woolf devises a narrative into the essay and introduces a character she might have known on a train ride from "Richmond to Waterloo", an old lady called Mrs. Brown.

The narrator affirms that Mrs. Brown was simple but tidy, "very small, very tenacious; at once very frail and very heroic" (1924, n.p). She imbues Mrs. Brown with a complex inner life, one that could be easily dismissed given Mrs. Brown's apparent insignificance and simplicity. Woolf insists that when it came to understanding Mrs. Brown, the "details could wait. The important thing was to realise her character, to steep oneself in her atmosphere" (1924, n.p) and relies on her personal impressions about that complex character, seated by the corner. The narrator scans over Mrs. Brown's physical appearance in order to discover clues that might indicate aspects of her inner life. Therefore, Mrs. Brown's physical description will provide the traces of the subjective negotiations that inform Mrs. Brown's character, which supports the idea that Woolf's fiction combines what she had earlier coined the "materialist" and "spritualist" methods. Woolf asks herself: "What was it composed of – that overwhelming and peculiar impression? Myriads of irrelevant ideas crowd into one's head on such occasions. One sees the person, one sees Mrs. Brown in the centre of all sorts of scenes"

(1924, n.p). And thus, the narrator sets out to imagine her backstory, her fears and sorrows, giving us, the readers, a compelling and identifiable character through these fragments.

Woolf imagines how each of the Edwardians would describe Mrs. Brown and tell her story. According to her, they would look outside the train's window, imagine utopias, see the factories that pass by, but what would lack in such narratives would be the character Mrs. Brown herself. When she ponders upon Bennett, Woolf admits that he would at least keep his gaze on Mrs. Brown, but he would be so focused on providing descriptive details that Mrs. Brown would be lost as well. He would peruse her clothes in order to devise her financial status, he would describe each corner of the train, and in this sense, the character would mimic reality, but we, as readers, would not get the same Mrs. Brown Woolf's narrator gives us; the one Mrs. Brown that exudes life and human complexity beyond her limited status as a simple woman. Mrs Brown is a character that embodies the "proper stuff of fiction" as Woolf puts it in "Modern fiction" (1925), the "luminous halo" around her serving to select what kind of materialist description she needs in order to come alive. As Woolf declares,

> With all his powers of observation, which are marvelous, with all his sympathy and humanity, which is great, Mr. Bennett has never once looked at Mrs. Brown in her corner. There she sits in the corner of the carriage – that carriage which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only on the surface, it is the novelist who get in and out – there she sits and not one of the Edwardian writers has so much as looked at her. They have looked very powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature (1924, n.p).

Even though Woolf's discussion regards the writing of fiction in both essays, we may observe that she also applies what she recommends for fiction in her essay writing. As we read her essays in general, we may notice that she never tries to determine one single method to write fiction or assumes a commanding tone to devise rules; on the contrary, she rather suggests a perpetual conversation with the reader, almost guiding us through her conclusions instead of stating them. As Woolfian scholar Hermione Lee affirms,

> That evocative, scenic, sensual form of criticism is part of a larger agenda. What Woolf does in her essays is what she likes in, and recommends for, the writing of fiction. Her radicalizing programme to undo what she saw as the heavy-weight materialism, the over-stuffing, the literal detail and the thick plotting of the English novel is embodied in her critical preference for indirection and suggestion (2000, p. 99).

We may notice, then, how her writing style and her disapproval of mere representational description inform her essays, which also work under the sign of fiction (LEE, 2000, p. 90). It is possible to conclude, then, that even if Woolf can indeed be traced within the modernist tradition of essay writing, she also sets herself apart from her contemporaries by blurring the lines between different genres and by correcting the univocal form of criticism of Pound and Eliot, for instance, and their unified beliefs in "the new" "tradition", which seems rather old from Woolf's feminist perspective. This is so because not only are her essays directly connected to the fiction she was writing, but they also carry narrative marks and fictional aspects in them, not to mention the poetic inflections we may notice in a number of passages throughout her essays, as for example, the excerpt of the "luminous halo" in "Modern fiction" (1925). Her constant urge to undo the genres in her entire oeuvre seems to set her apart as an avant-garde writer. As Hermione Lee declares,

> Everywhere you look there is a cross-fertilisation, overlap and the dissolving of divisions. Essays turn into fictions, fictions turn into essays; criticisms of others or readings of modern fictions may be commentaries on her own processes; recommendations of how to read may be demonstrations of how to write (2000, p. 95).

1.3 **Bloomsbury Traditions**

If we are to continue to uncover how Virginia Woolf moved around – and within – the modernist scene, we should not stop at the public literary debates around her, for it is also fundamental to dwell on those who were close to her, the group of like-minded people who would have influenced her writing thanks to their talks and shared views on art, literature and life. This group of friends would be known as the Bloomsbury Group, in reference to the address where they used to hold their meetings and discussions, the house Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell shared at 46 Gordon Square, Bloomsbury. The origins of the Bloomsbury Group point to the brotherhood of Cambridge college students formed by Virginia Woolf's brother, Thoby Stephen, and other future imminent "Bloomsberries" like Leonard Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, Desmond McCarthy, Lytton Strachey, E. M. Forster and other Cambridge Apostles. They would already gather to discuss arts and critical theory in their student years, which would be later reproduced at Bloomsbury's *At homes*, as they named the meetings that took place at Gordon Square (PINHO, 2015, p. 42). Although

Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, née Stephen, could not join the Cambridge Apostles, since neither went to Cambridge and, even if they had done, they would not be admitted into the brotherhood, a different myth of origin for the Bloomsbury group can be traced through the experiences of the sisters in a Victorian household, as Woolfian scholar Davi Pinho proposes (2015, p. 93), and the artistic contribution of these Bloomsbury women should not be overlooked when compared to the role of Bloomsbury men. As a matter of fact, we could even suggest that the initial kick for the establishment of the group came from them, when both sisters decided to leave their old Victorian house at the bourgeois 22 Hyde Park Gate, in order to move to the then proletarian neighbourhood of Bloomsbury a year after their father, Sir Leslie Stephens, died, in 1904. Woolf's biographer Hermione Lee informs us that although the Victorian house was grandiose enough for the official royal biographer and his family, it was also cold and dark, located in a narrow street which impeded natural light to come in (Cf. LEE, 1996). The house at Hyde Park Gate represented all the Victorian strict moral codes which were so valued by Sir Leslie Stephen. The children of the family grew up within an arm's length from imminent Victorian buildings, like museums and educational centres (LEE, 1996, p. 35), which might suggest why the sisters were so eager for a change of scenery after their father's death.

It was Vanessa Bell (née Stephen) who found the house at Gordon Square. Besides the then non-aristocratic, working class atmosphere of the neighbourhood, the house itself bore many differences compared to the one from their childhood. It was considerably lighter and more spacious in a crowder and noisier neighbourhood, dripping with London life. Vanessa would also make changes in the house to differentiate it even more from the Victorian flair their old house possessed, like painting the walls white and hanging Chinese and Indian shawls around the house (LEE, 1996, p. 201). Her idea was to challenge traditional Victorian mores like the afternoon tea, for example. With simple daily activities, the Stephen sisters would move away from the oppression their father signified for them, mixing the private aspect of life with modernist activism.

We may affirm, then, that the members of the Bloomsbury Group firmly believed in the intertwining between private and public life with the innovations they wished to bring forth through art. Their break with traditional rules did not only apply to artistic theories but also to everyday living. Their unconventional behaviour was especially shocking to the traditional society of the time when it came to the interpersonal relationship between the friends of the group. They challenged the rigid core of English traditional family by engaging in open marriages – like the ones between Virginia and Leonard Woolf and Vanessa and

Clive Bell – and pursuing queer relationships among many of the members of the group. One of the most widely discussed non-marital, queer relationship in the Bloomsbury circle was the one between Virginia Woolf and the writer and gardener Vita Sackville-West, which not only consisted of a passionate love affair, but of a friendship that lasted for more than twenty years. Vanessa Bell also displayed such free and unconventional behaviour when she decided to move to the countryside during World War I to farm with her lover Duncan Grant and his lover David Garnett in a pacifist gesture to oppose war violence. Duncan Grant, in his turn, had relationships with numerous members of the group, such as Lytton Strachey, Maynard Keynes, and David Garnett himself, who would later marry his former lovers Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant's daughter, Angelica. In this sense, as Pinho explains (2015, p. 44), the Bloomsbury strand of *modernism* was not an organised artistic movement, but rather a communal way of life that crossed into a discussion and production of art. Thus, "it becomes difficult to exclude the lives of Bloomsbury from an analysis of Bloomsbury thought"[7] (PINHO, 2015, p. 44), for Bloomsbury is both a place and a moment in time.

However, the group's behaviour was not seen as ground-breaking or innovative by every critic and artist of the period. According to biographer Hermione Lee, as the group began to gain notoriety, "it inevitably gained its enemies and detractors. After the war, when the Gordon Square friends began to be famous, the execration increased, and the caricature of an idle, snobbish and self-congratulatory rentier class promoting its own brand of high culture began to take shape" (1996, p. 261). Furthermore, the group's pacifism and opposition to war were often seen as a form of escapism and disengagement with the country's affairs, as some of the male members of the group had indeed registered as Conscientious Objectors of war and were excused from serving. As scholar J. Ashley Foster (2018) informs us, Vanessa Bell's withdrawal to the country and Roger Fry's and Clive Bell's formalism were constantly interpreted as a removal from the political tensions of the period and an escapist stance regarding World War I. She warns us, however, against such claims:

> Roger Fry's and Clive Bell's formalist aesthetics, which insist on the autonomy of an 'art' from 'life', might tempt scholars to read all Bloomsbury production through this lens and lead them to erroneously believe Vanessa Bell's rural move, and the continued Bloomsbury production of art that more often than not failed to directly reference war was a form of isolated retreat (FOSTER, 2018, p. 281).

[7] "fica difícil excluir as vidas de Bloomsbury de uma análise do pensamento de Bloomsbury";

Fostergoes on to defend that the group's pacifism was indeed a conscious attempt to bring change to their society by formulating "positive peace", that is, an active implementation ofalternative practices and actions to promote peace. In Foster's words, "in art and writing, Bloomsbury sought an alternative to war, not as a way to hermetically ignore the world, but as a way to theorize and formulate visions of peace – visions which were echoed in actions across the many public and private spheres of their lives" (p. 277).

Thus, Jane Goldman's discussion of the avant-garde as art that disrupts the praxis of life allows her to conclude that "Bloomsbury artistic, political, social and sexual practices may be considered avant-garde" (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 48). After all, the changes that Bloomsburries called forth in art were mirrored by their stance in life, folding one into the other in their drive to break with deeply-rooted Victorian conventions. In this sense, one of the most disruptive and avant-garde examples of Bloomsbury behaviour was the *Dreadnought Hoax*, which happened in that year that marked a change in "human character" as Woolf would later affirm. It consisted of a plan elaborated by Virginia Woolf's brother Adrian Stephen and his Cambridge friend Horace de Vere Cole to deceive the British navy. In February 1910, Woolf, Adrian, Cole and other Bloomsbury friends such as Duncan Grant, Guy Ridley and Anthony Buxton dressed up and problematically darkened their skins with brown paint in order to pose as the emperors of the British colony of Abyssinia – which is modern day Sri Lanka. They were scandalously able to enter the ship *HMS Dreadnought* murmuring incomprehensible and invented words, proving that the British military knew very little of its Empire and other cultures in general. Although their deed could be considered shocking enough for British society, Adrian Stephen and Cole's original plan would be even more scandalous. The two friends originally intended to dress up as German officers and travel all the way to Alsace-Lorraine in the hopes of starting an international incident by marching German troops across the border with France (LEE, 1996, p. 278). According to Goldman, "such transgressive, orientalist masquerades, themselves perhaps suspect reinscriptions of sexual\racial stereotypes, were nevertheless understood to challenge the racialist establishment, as well as to expose the weakness of British military defense (…)" (2004, p. 49).

Thus, we begin to understand how Woolf's life and aesthetics were influenced by the group of friends that surrounded her, a group formed by writers, painters, critics, economists; in sum, people who read and changed their time. Curiously enough, Woolf met many of these friends, or began to deepen her relationship with them, from 1909 to 1911 (LEE, 1997, p. 266), which echoes her remark of 1910's importance for the years that would follow in "Mr.

Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924). Therefore, this particular year was prolific in many ways, mainly when it comes to November 1910, when the Post-Impressionist exhibition opened.

What art critic Roger Fry coined as Post-Impressionism would have a deep influence not only in the visual arts of the period, but also in literary aesthetics. In 1910, Fry decided to gather the paintings of some artists, who were mostly well-established in France, and present them to the British public as a demonstration of Post-impressionist art, a neologism invented by Fry himself. For the critic, Paul Cézanne was the epitome of the visual aesthetic he was identifying, and other names who had been related to Impressionism up to that point were also presented, like Paul Gauguin, Édouard Manet and Van Gogh. However, Fry's exhibition was intended to prove that there were fundamental differences between those painters and the ones who were recognisable Impressionists, like Monet and Renoir.

Modernist scholar Ann Banfield states that Fry's visual aesthetics relied upon the expression of that which cannot be seen, but felt, or as Banfield puts it, an art of "eyeless logical form" (2000, p. 256). In this sense, for the critic, art as pure depiction of reality would be less expressive. Banfield informs us that Fry believed that Impressionism's study on light was not enough when it came to blurring the appearances of the symbolic order. For him, the Impressionists still recurred to representation and depiction of sensible objects instead of painting that which the human eye cannot see, but only grasp through perceptions and emotion. In this sense, it was Post-Impressionism's use of colour and geometry that went beyond pure representation. According to Fry, Cézanne was able to achieve that through associating form to colour and through contouring objects with harsh lines. As Banfield notes,

> The dual aims of representing appearances and revealing their underlying order motivate Fry's theory of the relation between Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. (…) In Fry's version of the history of painting, Impressionism exhausted the project of art as solely 'the representation of the totality of appearance', failing to present anything more than the look of things. Its impasse was the crisis of unity – in painting, the crisis of design. Impressionism's equation of art with the exact reproduction of appearances had destroyed coherent design.
> Post-Impressionism, akin to logical philosophy, goes beyond recording the data of experience, taking them as 'a sign of some reality behind' (2000, p. 256 – 257).

Therefore, Post-Impressionist art aims at depicting a common object through different methods, "making the familiar strange" (BANFIELD, 2000, p. 257); it aims at rendering the ordinary extraordinary (BANFIELD, 2000, p. 258), and by doing so, appealing to each individual viewer's perception through a communal experience of art.

When we recall Woolf's defence of allowing the external impressions to combine in order to produce fiction, we notice that it directly echoes Fry's aesthetics for visual arts. As

we discussed before, Woolf criticised the "materialist" Edwardians precisely for their mere representation of reality and advocated for a writing that valued subjective perceptions and emotion in its appraisal of what constitutes reality. Thus, as we shall further discuss, we may affirm that Woolf applies Post-Impressionist methods to her writing, connecting the visual to the verbal expression. As Ann Banfield reminds us, Woolf believed that "The novel must be a 'picture-book', an art of the eye, then an 'abstract mystical eyeless book'" (2000, p. 257).

Despite the harsh critiques of art scholars of the period concerning the shocking colours and the apparent barbarism of the paintings at the exhibition (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 43), Roger Fry and Clive Bell held a second Post-Impressionist exhibition in 1912. Besides the France-based artists shown in the first exhibition, this one included Cubist paintings and contemporary English art from painters like Vanessa Bell (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 45). When it comes to the development of art theory, the highlight of the 1912 exhibition was Clive Bell's elaboration of what he termed "significant form". As he declared in the exhibition catalogue, the artist should be concerned with nothing but form, which entailed the idea of form for form's sake. In this sense, Bell's formulation of significant form seems to interpret the avant-gardeas an art that refuses to be informed by the praxis of life, one that is self-reflexive and self-contained. For Clive Bell, the artist was no longer a medium receiving impressions from the external world, but was rather somewhat impervious to its demands, striving to achieve a perfect form for his or her artistic expression. Jane Goldman informs us that

> Whereas the first had popularised the notion that artists were romantic geniuses, the second gave birth to the much more rigid doctrine of significant form (Nicolson: 13). This new doctrine emphasizes an emotional understanding of form for its own sake above everything else. The term 'significant form' begins to become almost synonymous with Post-Impressionism. (2004, p. 45)

Therefore, what Bell seems to expect from a work of visual art is not a representation of sensible reality, but a self-enclosed form (which may be abstract or otherwise) that cannot be mechanically interpreted, but emotionally felt. Thus, "This art is not concerned with depiction, but with the arousal of emotion" (GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 45). In Bell's own words, "We expect a work of plastic art to have more in common with a piece of music than with a coloured photograph" (BELL *apud* GOLDMAN, 2004, p. 45). Bell's significant form infuses Fry's visual aesthetics with emotional effect as opposed to pure representation. However, if Fry's aesthetics and Bell's significant form might be considered tenets of Bloomsbury formalism, their influence was certainly filtered differently by Bloomsbury painters and writers.

Virginia Woolf's fiction intertwines Bloomsbury formalism with the political tensions of her time, for instance. Post-impressionist concerns certainly inform her remarkable use of colour in the description of scenes which may give readers the sensation of seeing a picture. In her short story "Blue and Green"(1921), for example, Woolf stretches the verbal appraisal of colour to the point that it defamiliarises a scene, and the reader is left only with impressions. We might say that the author is almost attempting to study the effects of light and colour in a living room as time goes by, from morning to nightfall. As the sun still shines, the room is filled with the green from the lustre that reflects itself onto the objects. But when night comes and the room is lit by artificial light, the space is engulfed by blue, which deems the room dark and somber. There is no human presence in the scene or a plot to be followed; nothing but the passing of time, the objects and the dancing colours. Moreover, the narrative voice does not give an accurate likeness of a room as we know it, giving us instead an impression of what those objects look like under the light, as in a reverie or a daydream. As Bell's "significant form" would suggest, Woolf does not seem worried about portraying likeness to real things or providing a coherent, linear plot, but in conveying emotion instead.

She elaborates on the contribution of visual arts for literary aesthetics in a 1934 essay, "Walter Sickert: A conversation", in which she emulates a conversation between friends in a dinner-party, very much like one of Bloomsbury's *At homes*. The essay's narrative voice jumps from each friend's point of view on painting and writing until it reaches the conclusion that there is much in common between the two. If we are to draw a parallel between the essay's dinner-party and the Bloomsbury friends, we might imagine that the participants in the conversation could be writers, such as Woolf herself and Lytton Strachey; art critics, such as Desmond McCarthy and Clive Bell; and finally, painters, who were the majority of the Bloomsbury Group, like Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Dora Carrington and Roger Fry. Their voices are all mingled together as they discuss the recent exhibition of the British painter Walter Sickert. The writers of the group praise Sickert's work for being skilful in the art of storytelling through his paintings, and thus, their debate turns to colours and their infinite power of expression. In this sense, we may understand how the ability of storytelling through visual arts is important for a writer like Woolf, while an art critic like Clive Bell, who developed the notion of "significant form", would defend that the visual arts meant a withdrawal into pure aesthetics.

According to the voices in the discussion, appraising colour is an ability that the human eye must develop. However, for them, humans are no longer sensitive to colour due to the mechanical exigencies and dullness of modern life; as one of them puts it, "days spent in

the office lead to the atrophy of the eye" (1934, n.p.). In order to capture all the information colours may convey, one must be embedded into them, become them in their multiplicity, like the insects in the deep forests of South America, who are "all eye", do, completely absorbing the colours of their surroundings (1934, n.p.). Therefore, they conclude that when admiring Sickert's paintings, one becomes these insects, deriving a whole life story from a sprinkle of colour.

Thus, Sickert's work resembles that of a biographer, his ultimate goal would be to lay an entire life comprised in one single scene. According to one of Woolf's voices in the essay, his capacity of expressing an exact feeling through colours made him say infinitely more than a biographer would express in words:

> There it is – stated. None of our biographers make such complete and flawless statements (…) Hence the three or four hundred pages of compromise, evasion, understatement, overstatement, irrelevance and downright falsehood which we call biography. But Sickert takes his brush, squeezes his tube, looks at the face; and then, cloaked in the divine gift of silence, he paints – lies, paltriness, splendour, depravity, endurance, beauty (…). (1934, n.p.).

It is through the eye that the viewer takes in the essential feeling, the precise notion of the character portrayed in those colours. There are no dates, no names, no places, in sum, no factual detail which could interfere with the viewer's appraisal of the thing itself, that is, who that character/object really is.

What Woolf seems to be portraying in the essay is the art of storytelling nonverbally, through painting; but also, we might add, the art of painting verbally, through literature. She seems to deem it possible to convey the silence and the depth of nonverbal modes of communication:

> It is a very complex business, the mixing and marrying of words that goes on, probably unconsciously, in the poet's mind to feed the reader's eye. All great writers are great colourists, just as they are musicians into the bargain; they always contrive to make their scene glow and darken and change to the eye (WOOLF, 1934, n.p).

As the discussion of the Bloomsbury friends move on, the painters remove themselves into silence so as to start working manually, cutting images and then rearranging them in a work of collective collage. Among many others, this seems to be a lesson to be learned from Woolf's fellow painters: how the writer can bring the severed impressions together maintaining the silence and the impact they have in real life.

The influence of her painter friends is also deeply felt in Woolf's novels. Let's take the painter Lily Briscoe, in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), for example, and her search to paint figures in a way other than a representational style, much like Woolf's Bloomsbury friends did. She strives to paint an image of Mrs. Ramsay which goes beyond her perceivable figure as a perfect wife and hostess, an image that reaches her interiority and accesses an inner knowledge derived from her roles as a woman and as a mother; that is, a knowledge different from that of universities, represented by her husband, Mr. Ramsay; one that diverges from masculine language and dwells unelaborated in her silence. This determination to paint what cannot be named or said may echo Bloomsbury's belief that an image itself exists independently of a subject that apprehends it, but here we see how this discussion is implicated in the gender debate of Woolf's time. Even if "significant form" may avert the politics of the avant-garde in theory, Bloomsbury forms came to *significantly* signify political interference of different strands. After all, the Bloomsbury group firmly believed that different subjectivities and their different apprehensions of reality created a multiplicity of perspectives that should be expressed, not simplified (PINHO, 2015, p. 47).

Therefore, when Lily paints Mrs. Ramsay, it is not a recognisable human being that we see portrayed on her canvas, but a geometrical shape, an image that comes from her internal and subjective perception, or impression, of Mrs. Ramsay's interior life. The confusion of those who look at it is inevitable: "What did she wish to indicate by the triangular purple shape, 'just there?', he asked. It was Mrs. Ramsay reading to James, she said. She knew his objection – that no one could tell it for a human shape. But she had made no attempt at likeness, she said" (1927, p. 64). The fact that Lily's Mrs. Ramsay is nothing but a purple triangular shape on a canvas suggests that there is no final, absolute interpretation for her painting; on the contrary, it is an image which could always be re-signified, again and again, by each viewer in their own time and space, rendering it timeless.

Furthermore, we may argue that Lily' choice of colours in the novel are not randomly made. In *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf* (1998), Jane Goldman affirms that the colours expressed in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) have a political undertone as they evoke the colours of the suffrage movement, which are purple, white and green. These three colours are recurrent in the novel, and their choice may indicate that Woolf's use of colour is not only Post-Impressionist but also feminist. Lily's purple triangular shape gains a different political dimension, as well as the whole novel. As Goldman states,

> Her [Lily's] struggle for self-expression in male dominated environs coincides with her visions of 'bright violet' and 'staring whites'. These colors seem to defy the masculine presences overshadowing her work, and may offer a glimpse of suffrage colours (…) Lily's prismatics stand for an alternative to the patriarchal chiaroscuro threatening to engulf her (1998, p. 172).

Thus, once again we recall the importance of the year 1910 for Woolf's oeuvre, not only when it comes to the Post-Impressionist exhibitions, but also because this was an important year for the women's rights movements culminating in a suffragette demonstration "on or about December 1910", when "human character changed". It was on 18 November 1910, to be exact, while the Post-Impressionist Exhibit was on at the Grafton Galleries in London, that the suffragettes took to the streets and marched to the Houses of Parliament demanding their right to vote. They were met with police violence, which ranged from being beaten up to being sexually abused on this day that came to be known as "Black Friday" (Goldman, 2004).

It becomes clear, then, that in Woolf, like the Post-Impressionist exhibit and the feminist protests that followed Black Friday, the aesthetic happens alongside the political, or rather gives it form. Woolf's aesthetics *is*, in this sense, political, which makes her a noncompliant actor in some of the modernist scenes she herself performs as an artist.

1.4 **Whose tradition is it when a "poet's heart" beats in a "woman's body"?**

In *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf* (1998), Jane Goldman comments on Woolf's so-called abstractionism and how critics tend to accuse her of lacking social engagement because of it. Goldman states that throughout the years many critics have related Woof's predilection for perceptions, impressions and emotions to French philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of *durée*, that is, a non-linear, subjective time, pertaining to one's psychological perception of time rather than to chronology (1998, p. 4). As Goldman discusses Woolf's idea of the *moment*, mainly elaborated by Woolf in "A Sketch of the Past" (1976), she alerts us to the dangers of homogenising Woolf's works under the label of "inner flux", which might erroneously favour abstraction as an apolitical stance (*idem*). To Goldman, connecting Woolf's "moments of being" to Bergson's *durée* would lead to a denial of the historical experience within Woolf's oeuvre.

If we take a closer look at Woolf's description of a moment of being, we might understand why it is quintessential that we cease to deem it a modernist abstraction. In "Sketch of the Past"(1976), Woolf established that there are moments in one's life that are filled with meaning in which sensations come to the forefront of the mind, consolidating experience. She called them "moments of being", and, for her, they consisted of extreme awareness, moments that broke or opened up any mundane activity, such as reading a book or taking a walk (1976, p. 70). However, these moments are scarce in the banality of life, which imposes the kinds of social interaction that pull one back to the fabric of reality, such as everyday "small talk" or automatic actions. These moments of non-being represent the "nondescript cotton-wool" (1976, p. 70) of life, like a curtain of reality that covers meaningful experiences, those that can only be accessed if we reach beyond the protection of this cotton wool.

Instead of describing the moment as an abstract sensation, Woolf specifies such moments of deep understanding of reality as a shock or a blow. Such an understanding does not result from an explicable statement that can be put into words, but from a physical, poignant sensation that cannot be described (1976, p. 72). Woolf's attempt at an explanation is structured around three main scenes in which she felt the shock of a moment of being. In the first one, she is fist fighting with her brother Thoby in St. Ives, their childhood summer house. The shock came when she suddenly realised she would succumb to the impulse to destruct the other, even if there was a reason to fight after all, so she just let herself be beaten instead. The second one happened in the garden of the same house; she looked upon a flower and felt a deep understanding that the flower was part earth, coming to the conclusion that "the whole", the "real flower", is "part earth" as well as "part flower". The third one, also in St. Ives, happened after she heard her parents discussing the suicide of a family friend. She suddenly sees herself in the garden faced by the apple tree, which to her seemed to be connected with the friend's death in some way; feeling terrorised and hopeless, she could not bring herself to pass by that symbol that the apple tree had become (1976, p. 71).

In this sense, we may understand that there is, indeed, a physical and tangible quality to Woolf's moment that jettisons pure abstraction, or as Goldman puts it, "each instance involves the individual subject in relation to the (physical, bodily, material, natural) object world. Each 'exceptional moment' (…) is recalled with its own 'alien matter': Thoby's fists, the flower bed, the apple tree. There is an element of shock involved" (1998, p. 45). Therefore, we might interpret that such moments are to be felt with the entirety of one's body within one's historical and objective experience. Indeed, when Woolf describes how a scene

comes to her when writing, she uses the physical metaphor of being a vessel with holes on it, conveying the idea of a porous body through which the impressions are allowed to come *In:*

> This confirms me in my instinctive notion – it is irrational; it will not stand argument – that we are sealed vessels afloat upon what is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is a scene – for they would not survive entire so many ruinous years unless they were made of something permanent; that is a proof of their 'reality' (1976, p. 142).

Thus, the scenes or the impressions that will construct Woolf's fiction come in through a body marked by the historical experiences of a 20th-century woman. In this sense, the materiality of life is what invites the unconscious and the emotional to come in. For her, fiction seems to be a matter of combining the abstract and the material, the granite and the rainbow, in order to capture the "luminous halo" of life. As Goldman notes, Woolf's concern with the tangible is perceptible even in her own titles, for example. It is explicit in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) that Woolf is addressing women's location in the history of the world as well as their material needs, which renders the political statement of the title (1998, p. 5).

As we have seen so far, Woolf's point of view on writing converses with her fellow writers and artists. As discussed above, when we analysed "Modern Fiction", it is certainly possible to find there some echoes of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent". However, Woolf sets herself apart from her contemporaries as she challenges Eliot's main arguments in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" by gendering both Eliot's literary tradition of dead poets and the impersonal voice he preconises for every poet.

As Jane Goldman suggests (2004, p. 155), Woolf realises how the canon of dead poets Eliot is writing about is built upon male writers, which leads her to wonder how a woman can be traditional in Eliot's terms. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), very much like Eliot's argument, Woolf declares that in order to thrive in their craft, writers should have a tradition behind them to support their efforts. The author argues that in the case of women, however, there was no such tradition in literature to guide present and future women authors. She states that the impediments thrust upon the mothers of the past would stand in the way for the establishment of a women's literary tradition. Woolf muses that if the mothers that had come before her had at least been allowed to work and be independent, the women of her age "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" (1929, p. 39).

Indeed, Woolf realises that if a woman were to show any talent towards poetry and writing in the past as publicly and professionally as men did, she would have been silenced by the patriarchal society that shunned her to domestic duties. A woman with a "poet's heart" and the intent to make it a profession, Woolf seems to be saying, would have been ostracised, considered mad, or "unnatural": "When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then, I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet (…)" (1929, p. 72). To point out women's absence in the literary canons of her time does not mean to say, though, that women were completely devoid of a legacy. Woolf affirms that the few aristocratic poets and professional women writers, as well as those women who had been suppressed by the rule of patriarchy, must be reclaimed, and these mothers of the past must permeate women's literature since "we think back through our mothers" (1929, p. 105). Woolf seems to be saying that, even though they were continuously silenced by canon formations, these lost women poets lived and would live through the women writers of her present and her future.

As an attempt at rewriting the history of these unknown women and claim a spot for their silenced voices in the history of literature, Woolf resorts to fiction once again, and devises a hypothetical character in *A Room*, Shakespeare's fictional sister, Judith Shakespeare. She is one of her many women characters that serve as narrative devices in *A Room,* starting from the very narrator of the essay. Like Mary Carmichael – the paradigmatic woman writer who would have broken with the entire masculine tradition only by stating in her debut novel that "Chloe liked Olivia" (1929, p. 112) –, Judith Shakespeare also becomes a paradigmatic character for a broader context of silenced writers throughout History who could never live up to their talents because of patriarchal norms.

Firstly, in order to understand how the figure of Judith Shakespeare functions as a paradigm for a potential feminine literary tradition, we must ask what exactly a paradigm is. In "What is a paradigm?" (2009), the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben defends that a paradigm springs from a broader historical context as a singular element which exemplifies and updates a particular question (2009, p. 9). Being an example of a group, the paradigm or the example thus sets itself apart from its common use and opens itself to its contemporaneity. As the author exemplifies how syntagmas may be seen as paradigms, Agamben declares that to "be able of acting as an example, the syntagma must be suspended from its normal function, and nevertheless it is precisely by virtue of this nonfunctionig and suspension that it can show how the syntagma works and can allow the rule to be stated" (2009, p. 24). Thus, if we read the exemplary position Judith Shakespeare occupies in *A Room*, it becomes clear that

she serves as a paradigmatic impossibility for a feminine literary tradition that makes Woolf's creation of a tradition for women writers possible.

Woolf introduces the figure of Judith in the third chapter of *A Room,* in which she discusses why women do not appear in the literary canons. Woolf begins by exposing that women's lives are registered on the pages of history books as a constitutive absence, since she points out precisely the lack of representation of women in Elizabethan England. The fictional narrative voice stumps upon a book, *History of England*, by Professor Trevelyan. According to the narrator, this male historian discusses the lives of women in the 15th and 16th centuries, for whom marriage was an obligation, and whose husbands and fathers were allowed by law to punish and beat them (1929, p. 64). Records also show women from the 17th century onwards, but there was nothing about them in the times of Elizabeth and Shakespeare. According to the narrator, queens are mentioned, but the ordinary woman had been erased from History, which rendered it impossible to know "why women did not write poetry in the Elizabethan age (…); whether they were taught to write; whether they had sitting-rooms to themselves; how many women had children before they were twenty-one; what, in short, they did from eight in the morning till eight in the night" (WOOLF, 1929, p. 69).

In this sense, Woolf devises the figure of Judith Shakespeare, a common Elizabethan woman, in order to rewrite and insert the lives of these erased women in History. According to Woolf's narrator's musings, Judith was born in a middle-class family, and was forbidden to attend school so she would tend to her domestic chores, unlike her brother Willian Shakespeare, who read Greek in a perfectly adequate Grammar School. In order to materialise her talents, which were as great as her brother's, she had to flee her parent's house; finally, when none of her efforts were met with success – since theatres did not allow women to act professionally, let alone write plays – she had no alternative but to subject herself to a man and have her talent silenced as she became merely a mistress. Under the protection of the actor-manager Nick Greene, Judith ends up performing a paradigmatic role for a creative Elizabethan woman with the ambition of becoming a professional actress or playwright: she gives birth to an illegitimate child, reproducing the only way women had to create something, be it through marriage or prostitution. After failing at escaping from the masculine logic of feminine subjugation, Judith kills herself, Woolf says, and today she lies completely forgotten, "buried at some crossroads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle" (WOOLF, 1929, p. 72). Woolf's tale seems to teach us, then, that there could not have been a feminine tradition in literature because patriarchy would have done anything in its

power to contain "the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body" (WOOLF, 1929, p. 71 – 72).

Therefore, Woolf is not only rewriting History through fiction, but she is also claiming the power and the talent of the innumerable common women who could have never been the poets, the voices and the artists of their times in the public sphere. Woolf seems to be stating, then, that women's canon of dead poets, as Eliot puts it, indeed exists, but is a silenced one. As Goldman affirms,

> …Woolf seems to take up, and subvert, Eliot's imagery in her later work. Her portrait of Judith Shakespeare, for example, that forms the coda for *A Room of One's Own* (1929), seems to reverberate with Eliot's model of a collective dead speaking through the living. This is Woolf's prophesy of a woman poet to equal or rival Shakespeare – 'Shakespeare's Sister' – and her urging for the collective preparation for her appearance. But in reviving Judith Shakespeare who never lived, Woolf is regendering male tradition, inventing a woman's tradition, before voicing it for women, and as a woman (2004, p. 155).

In this sense, Eliot's impersonal voice, the one that gives itself up in order to voice and perpetuate the tradition of dead poets, is intrinsically masculine, since the tradition it supports is mostly masculine. Woolf, on the other hand, will advocate for an androgynous one, a voice that expresses both masculine and feminine sides of the mind, a voice that does not speak of an *I*, but rather speaks of *any I*, as we shall further discuss.

As much of Woolf's work, *A Room of One's Own* presents a feminine figure that paradigmatically embodies change and revolution in relation to the patriarchal society that oppresses women. Judith Shakespeare becomes not only the personification of this lack of a tradition but also a contemporary goal: to reclaim her voice becomes the task of every woman writer who will come in the future, as Woolf states in the last sentences of *A Room:* "But I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while" (1929, p. 151). Such paradigmatic figures of a culture to come are present throughout Woolf's oeuvre, like the Victorian cook who, in "Mr. Bennett and Mr. Brown" (1924), emerges "like a leviathan in the lower depths" (1924, n.p) of the kitchen to symbolise the shift of perspective the year 1910 had brought about. Likewise, in "How it Strikes a Contemporary" (1923), it is the historical figure of Lady Hester Stanhope, "for ever scanning the mountain tops, impatiently but with confidence" (1923, n.p), that is forever waiting for the messiah, for that something which is still to come, sustaining the modernist *sense of possibility* of new fictions in new world orders.So,Woolf begs us, readers, to follow her example and "scan the horizon; see the past in relation to the future; and so prepare the

way for masterpieces to come" (*Idem*). It would not be farfetched to suppose, then, that this messiah is embodied by the very feminine figures Woolf creates, such as the paradigmatic Judith Shakespeare, the one for whom we must "work" (and not merely wait). But in order for her to come, there must be a different kind of writing, one that breaks with the logic of a patriarchal society, the logic that engulfs the other and erects itself as the only subjective imperative; a new writing that we shall investigate in depth in the following chapter.

2 **VIRGINIA WOOLF IN THE SCENE OF *ÉCRITURE FÉMININE***

> Our own subjective singularities are in truth composed, on the one hand, of many other near or distant humans, we are carriers of previous generations, we are, without knowing it, heirs, caretakers, witnesses of known or unknown ancestors; on the other hand we are full of others originating from the books we have read. We think we speak the English, or French, of today. But our English or French language of today is of yesterday and elsewhere. The miracle is that language has not been cut from its archaic roots—even if we do not remember, our language remembers, and what we say began to be said three thousand years ago. Inversely language has incorporated in our own times, before even we know, the most recent elements, linguistic and semantic particles blown by the present winds.
>
> *Hélène Cixous*

Virginia Woolf's oeuvre reveals that one of her greatest concerns was the act of writing. We have seen how Woolf's essays perform an extensive critical and fictional investigation of form and content, probing into the literary traditions and the discussions of tradition of her generation. Revealing that Woolf's modernist essays are metalinguistic and hybrid attempts to analyse, delimit, ponder upon and fictionalise her own art, we have established that Woolf's "conversation with the past results in different forms of rewriting and salvaging, producing real feminist interventions in the context of the modernist discussion"[8] (PINHO, 2020, p. 16-17). Woolf constantly questions women's position in the history of literature, wondering how they could thrive in a field constituted and instituted by men. It is, perhaps, in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) that she further expands on the matter. In this long essay, filled with fictional narrative voices, Woolf analyses the setbacks women writers faced in the history of British Literature and begins to unfold a feminine way of writing through a feminine sentence that would transform the moulds of an ongoing masculine canon. Woolf's final conclusion seems to point at a non-binary solution, since she declares that the mind of a

[8] "a conversa com o passado em Woolf resulta em diferentes reescrituras e resgates, produzindo verdadeiras interferências feministas no contexto da discussão modernista".

great writer is androgynous — that is, that she or he would be able to access both feminine and masculine sides (which we can interpret as values and performances) of their mind.

Woolf's defence of androgyny, however, did not please some feminist critics, such as, for example, the American writer and literary critic Elaine Showalter. In *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Showalter argues that Woolf's androgyny constituted an escape from a serious feminist position. In this sense, this chapter follows the tradition of another group of feminist critics, such as Toril Moi (1985), Makiko Minow-Pinkey (1987), Rosi Braidotti (2011), and others who tried to reclaim Woolf as a feminist by declaring that the attempt of deconstructingthe binomial "feminine/masculine" is indeed a feminist move. These feminist theorists and critics invite us to read Woolf as an early player of a contemporary scene — one that, as forerunner Toril Moi put it in 1985, we can begin to understand by engaging with "the theoretical advances of post-structuralist thought" (1985, p. 18). Bearing this in mind, we shall investigate Woolf's writings in the scene of Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*. In this chapter, we shall observe how both writers considermasculinity and femininity to be performances of historical roles that are in/formed by/in language, and that this very language which forms and informs these performances depends on a masculine logic of binary oppositions.

2.1 **Hélène Cixous, Virginia Woolf and the Phallocentric Performing Theatre**

Algeria-born philosopher, feminist thinker, fictionist, playwright and world citizen Hélène Cixous is one of the most prominent names of post-structuralist feminism. She is often referred to by the nondescript label of "French Feminism" alongside other thinkers who became popular in the 1970s, such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Leaving behind an excessive approximation of these philosophers, which may lead to a reductive overview of their works, what is of the utmost importance to this study is Cixous's long-term investment in the study of the social and discursive construction of gendered identities. She extensively studied the matter of sexual difference, adopting a non-essentialist approach in regards to historical, political and widespread social constructs of the masculine and the feminine as positions in language and culture. In her groundbreaking essay "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays", Cixous asks us "what would happen to logocentrism, to the great philosophical systems, to the order of the world in general if the rock upon which they

founded this church should crumble?" (1974b, p. 65). Throughout her work, she strikes several blows against this "rock": the metaphysical binaries which have established "the masculine" as a philosophical, literary, sociopolitical and subjective imperative.

Thus, as a feminist thinker, Cixous recognises that the rational subject in all human interactions is masculine, while "the feminine" is constantly related to the body, removed from reason and from the mind. Her main concern, then, is to analyse how such a dynamic is reproduced through language. In other words, Cixous's writing investigates and attacks phallocentrism: the dominant masculine ego that she identifies as the valorised voice/word in all human communications. By exposing the limiting effects of phallocentrism, Cixous also investigates how a feminine approach to language would liberate thought itself, as Cixousian scholar Abigail Bray explains: "For Cixous, change and freedom come into being at this very intimate everyday level, by unmasking and interrogating the language we use to speak through sexual difference" (2004, p. 4). In this sense, Cixous believes that a feminine writing — or as she coins it, *écriture féminine* — would be, then, a deconstructive movement that surpasses the restrictive codes of phallocentric thought.

Feminist critic Julia Dobson argues that, although Cixous's international reception is mainly focused on her philosophical and theoretical work, especially in the English-speaking academic environment, she is mostly known as a playwright in francophone communities (2002, p. 8). It is no wonder, then, that her theatrical aesthetics informs and composes all her texts on feminist theory, providing the vocabulary for her analysis of the construction of discursive gendered identities as performance. The theatricality of gender becomes evident when Cixous dubs the world a "Phallocentric Performing Theater" in *The newly born woman* (1975, p. 40), acknowledging the "scene" of writing as a pivotal instrument to reveal the construction of gendered subjectivities and perhaps "recast" them, to stick with her analogy. In Cixousian terms, society constitutes the central stage for the masculine subject to rule over other subjectivities. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that we are also following Cixous's theatrical influence when we bring forward terms such as masculine and feminine "roles" and when we investigate matters of gender "representations" and "positions" in language. In this sense, we might also think of Woolf's androgyny as a scene that unfolds at the level of *écriture féminine*, as we note that both concepts struggle to deconstruct pre-established notions and marks of gender in language through writing.

Abigail Bray reminds us that, when we consider the importance of language in shaping the performance of identities in Cixousian philosophy, it is important to remember that she relies on Jacques Derrida's attack on logocentrism, which is the idea that societies

have been constructed upon the primacy of *the spoken word* and its illusory proximity to *the truth*, two meanings that are subsumed under the polysemic Greek word *Logos.* According to Bray, the constitution of meaning and reason would entail the exclusion of other subjectivities in order to establish a single truth, or a single subject that enunciates the discourse, since "*A* only comes to being through the exclusion of not-*A. A* renders its negative invisible, as no-nothing" (BRAY, 2004, p. 24). Cixous realises that this *Logos* is entirely masculine and erects its dominance over the exclusion and subjugation of "the feminine". In this sense, following Derrida's terminology, Cixous connects the idea of the phallocentric subject with logocentrism to define the notion of phallogocentrism, that is, a system grounded upon the masculine word and dependent upon the historical exclusion of women from the public sphere, making a feminine spoken and written word virtually impossible in modernity. If the several Women's Movements from the 18th century to contemporaneity have striven to include a feminine voice into the public arena, Cixous will think of *writing* and *literature* as mediums that can escape from a masculine economy by enacting feminine desires. Thus, we follow Bray's assertion that for "Cixous the masculine structure of phallogocentrism has 'passed itself off as eternal-natural' when in fact it is a type of writing machine which artificially orders reality, social structures, everyday lives, our very history, our very philosophy" (2004, p. 52).

It is no secret that, throughout history, women have been oppressed, used and excluded from the enlightened society of decision-making men. As those who have historically owned the word and dominant discourses, men have had the power to define women as second rate beings, as objects, as the marginal others that revolve around a masculine centre. Cixous reminds us that far from being simply left out and pushed to the margins by the "father", women are also included in this masculine system by being used according to masculine purposes. Therefore, in Cixous's oeuvre, women have been claimed by the male imaginary as passive objects of desire. In other words, women are subordinated to a masculine control of not only their bodies but also their minds, and it is this control that sustains the current masculine order (CIXOUS, 1974b, p. 65). Thus, the subjugation of women's bodies is cemented by the philosophical and logical structure of society as we know it today.

Decades before Cixous, Woolf anticipated this double circumstance of exclusion and subjugation of "the feminine" in phallogocentric society when she declared, in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), that women's roles in a masculine system were to reflect men's ego twice as big, to make them believe in themselves and to praise their qualities so to keep the logical

order of the world running, or else, "probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle" (WOOLF, 1929, p. 55-56). She had already perceived that the masculine subject had pervaded language with its "I", shaping reason and logic accordingly, and relegating "the feminine" as the *other* and the object of communication. As her appointed solution to this matter seems to be androgyny and not "the feminine" as a final goal, we may interpret that she already rejected binary modes of thinking. As feminist critic and scholar Toril Moi shows us, through "her conscious exploitation of the sportive, sensual nature of language, Woolf rejects the metaphysical essentialism underlying patriarchal ideology, which hails God, the Father or the phallus as its transcendental signified" (2002, p. 8). Thus, Woolf seems to deny binary oppositions and to advocate for the deconstruction of discursive gendered identities as a feminist struggle, anticipating the main points of post-structuralist feminism.

Twenty years after *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Simone de Beauvoir would denounce women's second-sex status precisely by destabilising the social, political and symbolic contours of women's bodies, proving that "the feminine" is a culturally forged code, as she states in her well-known passage from *The Second Sex* (1949): "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 330). So, women, as subjects, are impelled by culture to adopt what is to be perceived as feminine characteristics and feminine values. Even though their disagreements are numerous, post-structuralist feminism would agree with Beauvoir's statement when it comes to the non-biological approach to the construction of gendered identities. As a matter of fact, as Woolfian scholar and Cixousian critic Susan Sellers clarifies in *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (1994), Cixous employs the term "masculine" and "feminine" as "an approximation of the ways men and women therefore tend to respond to the social, political and cultural order" (1994, xxviii.). However, besides analysing cultural and political dichotomies, Cixous and the post-structuralists introduce the discussion of the role of language in the formation of the gendered subject and how they perform within its binary logic. In this sense, we could say that culture itself would be, thus, shaped by *Logos,* that is, the dominant word that creates the divisions between subject and other, between masculine and feminine. Therefore, writing becomes a vital instrument to deconstruct this deeply rooted phallogocentric order. As Sellers affirms,

> For Cixous, language is endemic to the repressive structure of thinking and narration we use to organize our lives. Since woman has figured within socio-symbolic system only as the other of man, Cixous suggests that the inscription of women's sexuality and history could recast the prevailing order. She sees writing as the locus and means of this reformation (1994, xxviii)

Therefore, if "the masculine" as a social code dominates world orders, all the concepts generally pertaining to the masculine role gain relevance to the detriment of those of the feminine role. This is how, in our society, power is normally associated with masculine, as well as violence and war, politics and economy, religion and education, in short, concepts that engender the public sphere. And since women have been relegated to "the safety" of the home and made to operate the house and family life, the private has historically been the domain of the feminine. It would not be farfetched to conclude that such dynamics of binary oppositions end up being translated in language itself and in the manner in which artists express themselves. After all, if culture incorporates the values and positions attributed to the masculine and the feminine, it would be possible to assume that we, as actors in a theatre, reproduce such positions in language, which results in a division between a masculine language and a feminine one. In essays such as "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), what Cixous reveals is how the former has dominated the latter in order to maintain the phallogocentric machinery running, and how "the feminine" can laugh and bring this machinery to a halt.

This Phallocentric Performing Theatre seems to explain why men have had an upper hand in what concerns expressing their minds, since their values prevail in a language that runs the public world, making men its leading actors. In fact, French philosopher Luce Irigaray defends that men and women do express themselves differently, not because of their biological sex, but according to the social roles acquired by their historical identities in language. For her, women's discourse tends to be less subject-oriented since this role has been undertaken by men and denied to women (Cf. IRIGARAY, 1991). As scholar Margaret Whitford demonstrates in *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in The Feminine* (1991), within "this system, the only feminine identity available to women is that of 'defective' or 'castrated' men; women are not symbolically self-defined" (p. 3). Thus, if men's and women's experiences are different considering their historical and social roles; if the masculine word has been the foundation of a phallogocentric society and the current discourse, how can women writers communicate their inner experience and be the subject of their own sentences?

If we think in literary terms, canonical works of theory and criticism have reflected such opposition not only in terms of praising male writers to the detriment of female ones, thus composing an enduring tradition that revolved solely around men authors, but also in terms of the subject, matter and the structure of their critical concerns. We could say that Virginia Woolf is one of the firsts to question this masculine tradition in terms of literary criticism, theory and practice. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) she remarks that:

> (…) it is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are 'important'; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes 'trivial'. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room (1929, p. 102).

In this sense, feminine experiences were dismissed and seen as unimportant. Moreover, they were to be buried deep and hidden in an endeavour to keep women pure, submissive and utterly sweet. According to Woolf, the impositions made by a masculine-ruled society upon women's minds become an inner voice that would urge the modernist woman, for example, to achieve the standards of a perfect Victorian wife, which would include not only a life of devotion to home and family but also a meek subservience and sympathy towards the husband and men in general in order to please and flatter, or in other words, to uphold the functioning of the masculine order. Woolf denominates such inner controlling power in a 1931 essay, "Professions for Women", as the "Angel in the House", a Victorian ideal immortalised by Coventry Patmore's homonymous poem (1854). Its main function would be to impede the free expression of one's mind and hinder writing, in her own words,

> For, as I found, directly I put pen into paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot be dealt openly by women (1931, p. 180).

Further along the essay, the narrator deals with the Angel by getting it by the throat and killing it. However, even if women writers were able to surpass the conventionalities and mores which impeded them to write freely, imposed on them by phallogocentric society, they would still have to deal with another restriction: a masculine language carved to convey masculine values and ideals; a language committed to consuming the *other* and establish a division between subject and object. Therefore, the woman writer would have to devise new tools, a new sentence that would be able to express and account for her unconscious mind and experiences, for "the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber" (WOOLF, 1931, p. 5) to surface on her page. Thus, the feminine sentence as a textual device could, in turn, reveal a new mode of thinking that might shake the foundations of phallogocentrism and challenge the supremacy of masculine language. It could bring forth alternative performances, different from those of the imperative masculine subject.

Reading essays such as “Sorties”, however, suggests that Cixous does not mean to exchange one side of the binary difference for the other, even when she calls forth a “feminine” language. She believes that women are closer to achieving writing without the impediment of a domineering subject, since this is a position they were never able to occupy within a phallogocentric logic. Thus, by identifying with the feminine we do not become limited by its values and social roles, but rather allow for other subjectivities to arise, once the feminine is already located in the margins, in the border, prone to multiple processes of becoming. This seems to be the starting point for *écriture féminine* and is precisely what constitutes its revolutionary aspect: it is a writing that adopts the feminine marginal position in society in order to freely express multiple subjectivities, and by doing so, destabilise the “rock” upon which the phallogocentric system is founded, its binary logic. As Sellers explains,

> First, while Cixous suggests that feminine writing is potentially the province of both sexes, she believes women are currently closer to a feminine economy than men. As a result she sees in women’s writing the potential to circumvent and reformulate existing structures through the inclusion of other experience. (1994, xxix.)

This means to say that the impersonality, which being relegated as outsider and as other entails, allows the feminine to potentially embrace *everyone* (CIXOUS, 1974a, p. 29), as we shall discuss later on.

This shift to feminine language could, then, bring about a defamiliarisation of normative values established by phallogocentrism. As contemporary philosopher Rosi Braidotti indicates, “disidentification involves the loss of familiar habits of thought and representation in order to pave the way for the creation of creative alternatives” (2011, p. 83). Although Braidotti does not think in terms of the feminine and the masculine, her thoughts and her concept of nomadism are interesting to the discussion. According to the author, a nomadic becoming is characterised by a positive relationship with difference and the rejection of repressive structures (2011, p. 2). Here, she takes Deleuze’s notion of becoming, which means to become-*other* not by mere imitation or identification, but by a process of undifferentiation and indiscernibility with the *other*. In other words, one becomes *other* through the acknowledgement of difference (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 1997, p. 20). In this sense, becoming a nomad for Braidotti is to affirm difference as a positive asset, which would entail the abandonment of an ego based on Sameness and the acceptance of multiple subjectivities. According to her, the nomadic process

> … entails the active displacement of dominant formations of identity, memory, and identification (…) Nomadic becomings are rather the process of affirmation of the unalterably positive structure of difference, unhinged from the binary system that traditionally opposed it to Sameness. Difference as positivity entails a multiple process of transformation, a play of complexity that expresses the principle of not-One (2011, p. 151).

Thus, Braidotti seems not to be considering "the feminine" as the single realm in which the dominant subject would be deconstructed, but rather a multiple nomadic becoming that would allow for the emergence of multiple subjectivities — allowing differences to remain different in the process. For her, Woolf is an example of a successful achievement of nomadic becoming since, in her oeuvre, she produces countless becomings of others, regardless of gender, creating what Braidotti calls an intensive genre. According to the author, Woolf's openness to perceptions and external sensorial impressions is exactly what allows her writings to be so prone to accommodate nomadic processes of becoming (2011, p. 152). Once again, writing seems to be the medium in which the destabilisation of the imperative subject of patriarchy becomes possible.

As we have been discussing through this section, both Woolf and Cixous consider writing the main locus for the inscription of multiple different subjectivities. It is important to analyse, then, how they deconstruct this masculine language at the level of the sentence to allow the *other* to come to light.

2.2 **Marrying Oppositions: Relying on the Uselessness of Words**

Cixous advocates for a writing that escapes from the logic of the same, that is, of the masculine order that automatically eliminates and consumes the *other*. For her, this writing is *écriture féminine*, in which women writers – and also men who possess a "man-womanly mind" (WOOLF, 1929, p. 132) that is able to erase the mark of the ego and allow for "the feminine" – would not be bound by patriarchal modes of representation, with their political and aesthetic implications. In other words, *écriture féminine* would function as a gateway to rewrite the logical and philosophical exclusion upon which a phallogocentric society has been built. In this sense, reason itself is seen as what imprisons writing within the masculine logic of the same. As Cixous affirms in "La – The (Feminine)" (1976), the writings that are purely

masculine are “slaves of reason, the descendants of the lovers of God with his grammar” (p. 59), while feminine writing would be precisely what frees the mind from the boundaries of reason and what allows for the creation of a different form, one that could change old, obsolete patterns.

This is so because, according to Cixous, women allow themselves to escape inwards. They are able to access the unconscious, the realm of dreams, through their words (1976, p. 59). Therefore, even if they have the tools crafted by phallogocentrism, feminine writers would be able to rearrange them and choose not to engage with this language, which implies the death of the *other,* in a language that embraces multiple *others* without erasing their differences. In “La – The (Feminine)”, Cixous states that “She knows not no, name, negativity. She excels at *marrying oppositions* and taking pleasure in this as a single pleasure with several hearths” (CIXOUS, 1976, p. 59, our emphasis). It is important to notice that for Cixous, this “she” does not mean a biological, essentialist “woman”, but it is a metaphor for a common feminine, a historically marginal position occupied by women as *other* to a self-professed universal He.

Woolf also approaches the matter of the marriage of words in a 1937 essay titled “Craftsmanship”. She defends that, firstly, words are not to be trusted, and, secondly, that they are not useful, since words carry a multitude of different meanings (1937, p. 198). Therefore, we should not rely on them to convey a specific, direct message. In a famous passage of the essay, Woolf remarks upon the past of words and the memories they acquire with the passing of the years. She takes a phrase she read on a metro sign, “Passing Russell Square”, out of its mundane, rational meaning and breaks it into a myriad of other significations, bringing to light the hidden meanings gathered through time (1937, p. 199). As she repeats these words, the word “passing” begins to evoke the passing of time, and, suddenly, death creeps into this mundane informational phrase. The sonorous quality of the word “Russell” brings to her mind the rustling of skirts or of falling leaves. This leads Woolf to the conclusion that words, then, pack sundry oppositional marriages, which form layers of meaning. According to the author,

> Words, English words, are full of echoes, of memories, of associations – naturally. They have been out and about, on people’s lips, in their houses, in the streets, in the fields, for so many centuries. And that is one of the chief difficulties in writing them today – that they are so stored with meanings, with memories, that they have contracted so many famous marriages. The splendid word ‘incarnadine’, for example, - who can use it without remembering also ‘multitudinous seas’? (WOOLF, 1937, p. 203)

Thus, when evoking the memories behind common words, Woolf seems to be highlighting the importance of rambling around them – curiously enough, "A ramble around words" was mentioned by her as an alternative title for the essay (1937, p. 198) –, since when we ramble, the unconscious mind is stimulated, digressions are prompted, and the depths of experience come to light. We may say that one is free, indeed, from the ties of a patrilinear thought. Moreover, Woolf's reference to "multitudinous seas" is a direct quote from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1606), in which the eponymous character utters in despair: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood/ Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather/ the multitudinous seas incarnadine,/ Making the green one red" (p. 782). This passage has become one of the many Shakespearean expressions that are consolidated in the English language and exemplifies the capacity words have to remarry over time in order to enlarge meaning in language. We could understand, then, that Woolf relies on direct but unreferenced literary intertexts in "Craftsmanship" (1937) precisely to demonstrate how literary language is able to destabilise useful and productive patriarchal communication.

Furthermore, Woolf's ramble around the words "Passing Russell Square" takes her to Victorian poet Christina Rossetti's poem "Passing away, Saith the world", in which Rossetti brings forth the ephemerality that human lives are subjected to and the swift approximation of death, as the following verses show: "Passing away, saith the world, passing away: / Chances, beauty and youth, sapp'd day by day: / Thy life never continueth in one stay". Her ramble also takes her to Alfred Tennyson's "Tithonus", since the poem also reflects the passing of time and the arrival of death, as we see *In:* "The woods decay, the woods decay and fall. / The vapours weep their burthen to the ground, / Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath, / And after many a summer dies the swam". Though Woolf does not name Rossetti and Tennyson, theirs are the verses her narrator connects, prompted by the word "passing": "Passing away saith the world, passing away [Rossetti]… The leaves decay and fall, the vapours weep their burthen to the ground. Man comes [Tennyson]…" (1937, p. 199). If Woolf performs the memory of words she is describing by adding these silent literary references, this collage of Rossetti's and Tennyson's verses genders her discussion. Attentive readers realise that while Rossetti prompts the ramble, Tennyson cuts it short (*man comes*!), and, as the narrator continues, "then we wake up and find ourselves at King's Cross" (WOOLF, 1937, p. 199). The useful meaning comes when man comes, this seems to be the meaning Woolf performs as she creates this dialogue between Rossetti and Tennyson. And what Woolf derives from this example is the understanding that the writer must be attuned to the echoes words produce in order to be led by them into the pools of the unconscious.

If we draw a parallel between these intertexts in “Craftsmanship” (1937) and *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), it becomes clear that Woolf brings gender into her 1937 discussion of writing and language, relating “the feminine” to the ability of escaping the constricting exactness of the patriarchal logic. In *A Room*, the narrator wonders what the men and women of the past used to talk about in gatherings like the luncheons and dinners she attends at the fictional Fernham and Oxbridge. She realises that it was not as much a matter of conversational content, but one of a sound quality. In the past, she muses, there was a humming sound that would accompany men and women’s conversations, one that she could only put into words through poetry. So, the narrator of *A Room* calls upon Tennyson and Rossetti, like Woolf would silently do again in 1937 in “Craftsmanship”, since men would utter something resembling a passage from “Maud”, part I, by Tennyson while women would respond with a passage from “A Birthday” by Rossetti. According to her, this poetic hum in conversations may have been lost after the Great War, since it shattered their illusions and romantic aspirations (1929, p. 28-29). If we recall Woolf’s main argument in *Three Guineas* (1938), she firmly believed that war was a masculine institution, independent of nationalities, which was enforced and repeatedly praised by institutional rites and symbols, such as coats of arms, uniforms, statues and flags that would safeguard a patriarchal logic. She continues her argument by stating that women should oppose this logic by rejecting all these masculine insignia and war itself (Cf. WOOLF, 1938). Thus, it is because of an abrupt interference from the masculine world, that is, the war, that the romanticism and the poetic hum no longer existed in conversations in the narrator’s time. Although the nostalgic tone regarding the poetic hums of the past is perceptible in the text, we may argue that this is an ambivalent passage in *A Room,* since Woolf seems to highlight the binary division in men and women’s discourses through Tennyson and Rossetti. The hums seem to reinforce the historical roles men and women acquired through time, which granted mobility and agency for men whereas women were forced into immobility and passivity. It can be clearly seen through the choice of poems to illustrate the hums. While Tennyson’s active speaker commands his beloved Maud to go to him (“Come into the garden, Maud”), Rossetti’s is delighted with her beloved’s arrival after waiting passively (“Because my love’s come to me”). Therefore, while men hum in agency, women respond in passivity.

Woolf’s choice of bringing Rossetti and Tennyson into “Craftsmanship” seems not to be random, then. Even though unreferenced by name here, Woolf’s evocation of these specific poets seems also to suggest a gendered discussion. While Rossetti’s poetic voice seems to accept the ephemerality of life by answering “Yea” to the inevitable decay (“Thou,

root-stricken, shalt not rebuild thy decay / On my bosom for aye. / Then I answer' d: Yea"), in Tennyson, we see an unconsoled poetic voice who desires immortality ("Alas! For this gray shadow, once a man - / So glorious in his beauty and thy choice, / Who madest him thy chosen, that seem' d / To his great heart none other than God! / I ask' d thee, 'Give me immortality'") and seeks solace in the youth of a beloved one ("Can thy love, / Thy beauty, make amends, tho' even now …"). Thus, by bringing these unreferenced poets, Woolf seems to draw a parallel between a feminine posture of embracing the unknown (and unknowable) opposed to a masculine will to act and react against what is not in his power to rule. The two poems also shed light upon the historical positions of women and men when it comes to which role *offers* and which *receives*, revealing one as masculine and the other as a feminine gesture or sound.

In *A Room*, while walking home after her luncheon party, the narrator is enraptured by the beauty of nightfall in an autumn afternoon, and despite her ironic acknowledgement of an imposition to be faithful and factual to her environment, she cannot help but feel in a Spring afternoon while Rossetti's poem echoes in her mind:

> As I have said already 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. Fiction must stick to facts, and the truer the facts the better the fiction – so we are told. Therefore it was still autumn and the leaves were still yellow and falling, if anything, a little faster than before, because it was now evening (seven twenty-three to be precise) and a breeze (from the south-west to be exact) had risen. But for all that there was something odd at work:
> My heart is like a singing bird
> Whose nest is in water' d shoot;
> My heart is like an apple tree
> Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit –
> perhaps 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 (1929, p. 32).

Therefore, if the world of representation would not do anymore, since it became undone after the war, the task to rebuild it is thrust upon the feminine word, which brings up the illusion of a Spring day; it is the feminine word or sound that erases, for a moment, the interruption of war and its masculine codes. There is no precision in her ramblings, no exactness, but only subjective perceptions and sensorial impressions evoked by Christina Rossetti's words. Through this feminine word/sound/gesture, then, she can bring back the poetic hum to the bareness of the world of masculine representation that surrounds her.

Cixous also relates the ability of rambling around words with gender. In "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" she states that this is an asset of women writers, considering that male writers who reproduce their historical role through masculine language would be imprisoned by phallogocentric rules. Thus, to remind and to dwell in the trace of significations of words is a key resource of *écriture féminine.* In the author's words, women writers "like uneasiness, questioning. There is waste in what we say. We need the waste. To write is always to make allowances for superabundance and uselessness while slashing the exchanging value that keeps the spoken word on its track" (1974b, p. 93). Thus, Cixous echoes Woolf's words when she states that through *écriture féminine*, writing from the unconscious runs through the uselessness of words, the trace they leave throughout the years, their waste and their remnants.

This is the writing of *jouissance*, which Cixous borrows from French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. As Bray affirms (2004, p. 27), *jouissance* is a libidinal moment in which the body breaks from the Symbolic Order, the realm of representation and identities that is ruled by the figure of the Father in Cixousian thought, to the pre-Oedipal state of the Imaginary, where the communion with the mother prevails. Bray explains that both Lacan and Cixous agree that the moment of *jouissance* can only be captured in language as a non-rational discourse; in other words, it is a moment in which "meaning slides into non-meaning, when thought is opened to unthought. *Jouissance*, or the explosion of sexual energy, is a revolutionary moment capable of rupturing the coherence of the Symbolic" (BRAY, 2004, p. 27). In this sense, Lacan understands feminine *jouissance* as a supplement of the phallocentric logic that captures women: it is a waste, a residue, what is left over from the rational discourse of patriarchal institutions. Thus, Cixous believes that writing in the mode of *écriture féminine* would be precisely to write in feminine *jouissance.* We could argue, then, that following the trace of meanings of a single word into the unconscious mind would restructure the order of a sentence; it would shift its directness and challenge grammatical senses of subject and object. In other words, it could defamiliarise or, to echo Rosi Braidotti's term, promote a disindentification of already established notions in language.

Let us take a fragment from Woolf's well-known "play-poem" *The Waves* (1931) to probe into this kind of feminine writing. Below, we may observe the author not only twisting and shifting meanings, but also enlarging the scope of simple words:

> The sun laid broader blades upon the house. The light touched something green in the window corner and made a lump of emerald, a cave of pure green like stoneless fruit. It sharpened the edges of chairs and tables and stitched white tablecloths with

> fine gold wires. As the light increased a bud here and there split asunder and shook out flowers, green veined and quivering, as if the effort of opening had set them rocking, and pealing a faint carillon as they beat their frail clappers against their white walls. Everything became softly amorphous, as if the china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid. Meanwhile the concussion of the waves breaking fell with muffled thuds, like logs falling, on the shore (WOOLF, 1931, p. 15).

If we look closely at the word choice in this particular excerpt, it is possible to notice peculiar associations, such as the sun laying blades, which could suggest a cutting solid substance rather than ethereal rays of light. In the same fashion, steel becomes liquid and china plates flow, while soft waves become hard as logs. Moreover, Woolf employs generic words such as "something" and "lump", which do not evoke anything certain or objective in the reader's mind. We are left unsure of how to imagine this green, unknown object at the corner of the window – which might indeed not be an object at all, but rather the effect of light blending and radiating colour –, so readers have nothing to do but to appeal to their own unconsciousness in order to imagine such a thing, which, in the end, turns out differently to each reader. Furthermore, words like "carillon" do not evoke a single, unique, direct meaning: we, as readers, could associate it not only to bell-shaped flowers, but, if we follow the trace of the word, one could also be reminded of bell tolls, sounds being carried on, far away, through the air. The author also plays with the sound of words, as for example, the alliteration in the passage "… fell with muffled thuds, like logs falling, on the shore", reinforces the muffled sounds she wishes to evoke. In the end, we are left with a "softly amorphous" scene, where nothing is really like it seems – or pretends – to be.

Thus, Woolf creates through words an image that challenges pre-established notions and senses; in this passage, Woolf's writing performs the idea that hers is no longer a representational paradigm. Her writing pushes readers to rely, instead, on perceptions and sensorial impressions. *Écriture féminine* dares to reimagine concrete meanings and significations; it challenges and broadens the reader's scope of mind, allowing for the flight of imagination. It is clear, then, that to create such plural and multifaceted possibilities one needs a sentence according to the task.

2.3 **A Sitting-Room Education: The Feminine Sentence**

What both Cixous and Woolf seem to defend, then, is that the writings which result from a mind that is able to dive deep into the pools of imagination and the limits of experience are the ones that can escape the restrictions of masculine language by restructuring it to their purpose. They seem to gender this discussion when they argue that feminine writing is not constrained by their ego. Therefore, writing in the mode of *écriture féminine* does not seem to be a question related to sex as it is to gender roles. Both Cixous and Woolf offer male writers as examples of a writing capable of surmounting masculine language. They believed that Shakespeare, for example, was able to access "the feminine" through his work. Furthermore, in "First names of No One", Cixous remarks that Poe, Joyce and Kafka demonstrated such writing (1974a, p. 29), while, anticipating Cixous in *A Room*, Woolf also considered Shakespeare the epitome of a mind that is not constrained by the forces of phallogocentrism in language (1929, p. 132). In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's footsteps, Woolf introduces the idea of the androgynous mind as she declares that every writer should work with both the feminine and the masculine sides of their brains, which would set them free from the restrictions imposed by a binary and divided point of view, logic and language. According to Woolf, an androgynous mind is one that is "resonant and porous; that transmits emotions without impediment; that is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided" (WOOLF, 1929, p. 132).

Although her final answer to how one may overcome a masculine order in writing seems to be androgyny, we could still ask ourselves how one gets there in terms of language. Bridging Woolf and Braidotti (2011), one could understand the feminine as one of the plateaus in Woolf's becoming-androgynous, since throughout history, due to its marginal position in phallogocentrism, the feminine has known no centralised ego. Therefore, a feminine sentence is needed as a gateway to produce such writing, free from masculine restraints. If we think that, in relations of power, *man* has historicallyoccupied the position of subject while *woman* has stood as its specular object, as Woolfian scholar Davi Pinho argues, the feminine sentence becomes a fundamental first step towards one's minoritarian becoming (2015, p. 165).

In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf defends the idea that the tools offered to women in language, as well as the current narrative structure of novels, do not suffice women's purposes when it comes to writing their own experience. According to Woolfian scholar Makiko Minow-Pinkey, this is so because they are permeated by a man's sentence, which is not suitable for a feminine perspective (2010, p. 4). Therefore, reshaping not only literary genres but also the sentence itself is needed for women writers' expression. And it

might be possible to conclude that the former could be achieved by the establishment of the latter.

According to Woolf, a man's sentence is "so direct, so straightforward" in comparison to women's that it could be a relief to encounter such forthright and plain sentence after reading the twists and turns of a woman's phrasing (1929, p. 133). Such tendency could be due to a purely masculine mind's inability to explore the trace and the uselessness of words as we discussed above. The fact is that for Woolf, the first difficulty that a woman would find when beginning to write "was that there was no common sentence ready for her use" (1929, p. 105). When Woolf employs the term "common" we may interpret that she means that there was no sentence that the feminine and the masculine could share, which means that, for the author, sentences are indeed gendered.

Therefore, what women needed to do, according to her, was to reshape language as it was, to defamiliarise the order of a sentence and alter gender and genre structures in order to fit them naturally to her experiences, as Woolf declares in "Women and Fiction": "And this a woman must make for herself, altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shapes of her thought without crushing or distorting it" (1929b, n.p.). We are, thus, led to believe that the use of a feminine sentence could, in turn, shake the very basis of masculine language while destabilising the structure of novels and other genres, since bringing forth women's experience into a phallogocentric society in terms of language would mean "to destroy the very foundation and rules of literary society" (WOOLF, 1924, n.p.), as she affirms in her 1924 essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown". In this sense, a sentence becomes not only a material manifestation of language in which words are combined, but also a locus for the inscription of new performances and experiences, and the means to provide these performances with a vocabulary of their own.

When it comes to genre, in *A Room* Woolf acknowledges that the first literary form professionally taken by women was the novel. She admits that as middle-class women were mostly bred in the private space of their homes, surrounded by the restricted company of family members, they would be trained in the ability of keenly observing others and their mannerisms (1929, p. 93). For the nineteenth-century woman writer, it meant that "Her sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the sitting-room. People's feelings were impressed on her; personal relations were always before her eyes. Therefore, when the middle-class woman took to writing, she naturally wrote novels (…)" (WOOLF, 1929, p. 94).

Woolf's prime example of the woman novelist was Jane Austen. As it was expected, she was brought up in the atmosphere of the sitting-room, observing and being closely observed by her relatives. Therefore, fearing to get caught writing – as writing was an unsuitable occupation for women –, Austen used to hide her manuscripts when hearing someone coming, besides being constantly interrupted by servants and family members (1929, p. 93–94). What Woolf seems to be asking herself in this chapter of *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is whether such particularities of a feminine experience would alter the way women write; what could be, then, the effect of these close observations of human character, as well as these constant interruptions, in one's writing and particularly in one's sentence?

For Woolf, Jane Austen was, indeed, capable of creating a feminine sentence that would perfectly capture her experiences and thoughts while mocking her male contemporaries' sentences (1929, p. 106). As Pinho affirms, Woolf sees in Austen's sentence a glimpse into the lives of early nineteenth-century women as they were; it is a sentence that brings to light a feminine universe by laughing at the masculine values of her time — war, education, commerce — and by replenishing the absence of these values with feminine ones instead (PINHO, 2015, p. 136).

It would be interesting, then, to analyse what she considers to be a feminine sentence and in what it differs from a masculine one. According to Woolf,

> The sentence that was current at the beginning of the nineteenth century ran something like this perhaps: 'The grandeur of their works was an argument with them, not to stop short, but to proceed. They could have no higher excitement or satisfaction than in the exercise of their art and endless generations of truth and beauty. Success prompts to exertion; and habit facilitates success'. That is a man's sentence; behind it one can see Johnson, Gibbon and the rest (1929, p. 105).

It is possible to notice in the author's example the directness and assertiveness that she has mentioned before. Moreover, it is almost possible to sense an entitlement to the truth in "a man's sentence", as if a last word upon a subject were being delivered, which also reveals a belief in the myths of progress and rationality. We could argue that, through this masculine sentence, Woolf seems to be producing a critique of the myths of modernity such as its strong beliefs in an everlasting progress and in a system ruled by reason.

Let us look, then, upon a sentence produced by Jane Austen in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), that is, a feminine one according to Woolf:

> Elinor and her mother rose up in amazement at their entrance, and while the eyes of both were fixed on him with an evident wonder and a secret admiration equally sprung from his appearance, he apologised for his intrusion by relating its cause, in a

> manner so frank and so graceful, that his person, which was uncommonly handsome, received additional charms from his voice and expression. Had he been even old, ugly, and vulgar, the gratitude and kindness of Mrs. Dashwood would have been secured by any act of attention to her child; but the influence of youth, beauty, and elegance, gave an interest to the action which came home to her feelings (AUSTEN, 1811, p. 34 – 35).

In Austen's feminine sentence the reader is able to go from one character's angle to another's perspective in one single sentence, allowing for a plurality of viewpoints which a male sentence might lack. Moreover, we, as readers, are presented with sentences inside sentences, as if we were to penetrate deeper and deeper into the universe the author introduces us to, which could encourage all kinds of thoughts and digressions before the sentence gets to its final point. The reader can feel, indeed, the interruptions she might have endured in each pause, and the close observational skills that are required to portray such credible relationships. Finally, we could be led to conclude that a longer, more complex sentence could be a characteristic of a feminine sentence. We might even be reminded that for Woolf, Marcel Proust, who is known for his long run-on sentences, is "a little too much of a woman" (1929, p. 138). This trait would go well with the notion of the waste in words and the trace they leave while exploring the unconscious mind in writing.

Thus, Jane Austen could be a perfect example of how to devise and carve a sentence able to capture the feminine experience of her time at its length. It is a sentence that not only accounts for feminine experience as it also springs from it. Here, Cixous's *écriture féminine* and Woolf's feminine sentence would certainly converge in what concerns reshaping language in order to embrace a feminine experience. However, it is important to remember that being a woman is not a *si ne qua non* for feminine writing, since it is less a matter of sex than it is one of a frame of mind, which would be culturally and historically produced as well.

As a matter of fact, Woolf makes this notion explicit in a 1923 essay titled "Romance and the heart", in which she reviews Dorothy Richardson's *Revolving Lights* (1923). She praises Richardson's ability to create "a sentence which we may call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender. It is of a more elastic fibre than the old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes" (WOOLF, 1923, p. 367). Woolf seems to notice in Richardson's feminine sentence the capacity of reaching into the unconscious mind and bringing to light a woman's experience without the fear imposed by patriarchy. However, Woolf also acknowledges that some male writers had achieved a similar effect with their sentences, and that some had produced such sentences even more powerfully than Richardson. As Jane Goldman demonstrates in *The*

Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf (2006), this could be so because Richardson's sentence is feminine in what concerns content and not form (p. 112), that is, it effectively deals with the most intimate or deepest experiences of a woman's life but does not extend it to the surface of the text. Once again, Woolf seems to indicate that, although the feminine is the gateway to a writing with no bounds, it is only a first movement in the continuous motion of becoming-other. And, if we follow Goldman's lesson, what Woolf seems to say is that experience alone will not do: in order to undo genres and genders, one needs the flight of imagination, which is an androgynous flight for Woolf.

If Elaine Showalter (1977) considers this flight as Woolf's fear of patriarchal punishment, she does so because of Woolf's condemnation of anger in her essays. Indeed, among the qualities Woolf praises in Jane Austen's sentence is that of acknowledging her condition in life and phrasing it without bitterness. According to her, Austen did not write with anger and despair for being a woman in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, deprived of freedom and a public life, nor did she seem to envy men for possessing what she did not have (WOOLF, 1929, p. 95). On the contrary, Austen seemed to use language to laugh at the solemn world of men, being thus able to escape the limitations of that gendered literary sentence unsuited for women's use.

In Woolf's opinion, this would not be the case of Charlotte Brontë, for example. Although she recognises the eldest Brontë sister's importance for literary tradition (WOOLF, 1929, p. 92), she points out that her writing was dominated by reactionary anger when it came to women's treatment in her Victorian society. Such anger represented an impediment rather than a virtue of her sentence, for it merely reacted to a masculine paradigm. However, it does not mean to say that Woolf abominated feminine anger or thought it was unjustified, quite the opposite. What she seems to criticise, in fact, is how these Victorian writers who relied on anger to reclaim a space within the masculine order would end up reinforcing masculine tools in language as well, enrolling themselves in the masculine tradition they wanted to denounce, after all, "not to affirm the feminine universe, the feminine sentence, infers Woolf, is to consider it, again, a sort of inferior knowledge, abandoning it, once more, in the recesses of the house" (PINHO, 2015, p. 135)[9].

So, unlike Austen, Charlotte Brontë seems to resent everything that was denied her for being a woman; instead of laughing at it, she would present the reader with an account of her

[9]Não afirmar o universo feminino, a sentença feminina, infere Woolf, é novamente considerá-la um tipo de conhecimento inferior, novamente a abandonando nos recessos da casa.

complaints and tribulations rather than a full account of her characters' experiences. This would surely be marked upon her writing, and as the narrator of *A Room of One's Own* (1929) reads *Jane Eyre*, she finds the prose contorted and abrupt, replete with strange cuts and impeded thoughts. In her own words,

> but if one reads them over and marks the jerk in them, that indignation, one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely. She will write of herself where she should write of her characters. She is at war with her lot. How could she help but die young, cramped and thwarted? (WOOLF, 1929, p. 97)

Therefore, if the reader can no longer meet the characters in a story, but the voice of an author who says "I love, I hate, I suffer" — as Woolf puts it in "Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights" (WOOLF, 1925, n.p.) —, the novel is in danger of losing its multiplicity and relatability. Woolf considers, then, that the fault of writing in reactionary anger is that of becoming self-absorbed. And, as we discussed above, the quality of a feminine sentence and, in turn, *écriture féminine*, is precisely that of creating the possibility for multiple points of view, multiple subjectivities and *others.* When comparing Charlotte to her sister Emily Brontë in "Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights", Woolf posits that the lack of an "I" in Emily's story renders it relatable and timeless, since it goes beyond her own misfortunes: "But there is no 'I' in *Wuthering Heights*, There are no governesses (…). Emily was inspired by some more general conception. The impulse which urged her to create was not her own sufferings or her own injuries" (1925, n.p.). Thus, we could imagine alongside Emily Bronte's characters and feel with them even as 21st century readers, once they are neither dated nor limited by the problems of one identity position at one certain age.

Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that, for Woolf, a self-absorbed writing is the mark of a masculine sentence, once it is dominated by a male ego. It would, in turn, cause incapacity of recognising and allowing for the *other* in masculine writing, thus erasing any other lived or imagined experience than that of his own. After all, a purely masculine mind is an impeded one which cannot venture beyond its own musings, as Woolf asserts in *A Room of One's Own*:

> It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter 'I' (…) the worst thing of it is that in the shadow of the letter 'I' all is shapeless as mist. Is that a tree? No, it is a woman. But… she has not a bone in her body, I thought, watching Phoebe, for that was her name, coming across the beach. Then Alan got up and the shadow of Alan at once obliterated Phoebe. For Alan had views and Phoebe was quenched in the flood of his views (…) 'But – I am bored!' But why was I bored?

> Partly because the letter ‘I’ and the aridity, which, like the giant beech tree, it casts within its shade. Nothing will grow there. (1929, p. 134 – 135).

Therefore, the “I” on the page is what prevents the flourishing of new, diverse subjects in writing, and is further proof that the Victorian writers who wrote in anger, such as Charlotte Brontë, only reproduced and made use of the already existing masculine tools in language instead of devising one for their own use. Thus, Woolf considers that the effect such an “I” produces in writing is an excessively self-absorbed tone in a language that preaches rather than exposes an author’s misfortunes, whereas writers such as Austen and Emily Brontë were able to convey pictures of their feminine universes, denouncing their limitations in a different way, through their feminine sentence.

So, for Woolf, the problem seems not to lie so much in anger itself, but in the central “I” it produces in writing. The effect of anger is an egotism that restrains the flow of subjectivities, limiting one’s sentence to a single identity. As a matter of fact, Margot Kotler (2018) discusses the matter of anger in *Three Guineas* (1938) in the light of Woolfian scholar Jane Marcus’s “Art and Anger: Elizabeth Robins and Virginia Woolf” (1978), in which Marcus argues that the expression of emotions is a feminist tool to challenge and disturb patriarchy. Kotler defends that what we see in Woolf’s works is not a lack of anger or any other negative emotion, but a sort of impersonal anger that produces identification with collective experiences. Firstly, Kotler recognises that many humanist feminist critics would condemn Woolf for not sharing personal experiences in her writing, invalidating any feminist remark Woolf makes by considering her arguments not committed enough to “the cause” (2018, p. 37). Feminists, like the aforementioned Elaine Showalter, have argued that Woolf’s reticence in approaching anger more openly or from a personal point of view was a way of refraining from assuming a serious feminist position in order not to disturb or lose the respect of the male intelligentsia in Woolf’s life. However, Kotler opposes this idea by stating that Woolf’s refusal to manifest anger in a personal way is, in fact, a manner to develop a more “sophisticated methodology on anger” (2018, p. 36). After all, as Kotler affirms, “focusing on ‘weaker’ negative feelings is not meant as an avoidance or invalidation of Woolf’s anger, but as an attempt to shift the focus from discovering its source to paying close attention to the way that she uses language to convey affect as part of a feminist methodology” (2018, p. 37).

Therefore, according to Kotler, in *Three Guineas* (1938) Woolf draws from historical sources and biography in order to construct an impersonal and mature account of her anger regarding the war, which contradicts the stereotype of women being prone to emotional outbursts and irrational fits that used to circulate in Woolf’s time (KOTLER, 2011, p. 44).

Such personal and emotional detachment would create, in turn, a preference for the collective account of experience rather than a single authorial perspective, which renders Woolf's essay more relatable and timeless. Thus, through evoking the collective experience of a group of women in *Three Guineas* (1938), which she fictionalises from her own biography, Woolf effectively spreads the feminist message that war is a masculine institution that will only come to an end when women are not shunned from education and are finally allowed in the public world, making "the feminine" a new paradigm for this "public world".

Moreover, Woolf's refusal of the effects of anger bears marks of the modernist "impersonal theory" we discussed in Chapter 1. Woolf's refusal of an authorial and authoritative voice can then be read as a refusal of liberal ideas of the individual — her narrators speak from, for and with a collective "we", in "modernist conversations" (PINHO, 2020, p. 11). Indeed, Kotler remarks that Woolf never inserts herself in the narrative of *Three Guineas* (1938). She never speaks through an "I", but rather includes herself in larger groups, be it the "educated men's daughters" or the "Society of Outsiders" (1938, p. 235). Even though these are framed as collective experiences, they are drawn from occurrences she has known in her life, since they express the marginal position women had in a patriarchal society. Although she was born into the intelligentsia, that is, the intellectual English elite, she would still be an outcast in the public eye for being a woman.

It is possible to notice some influences of Woolf's personal life throughout her entire work; we have only got to remember the presence of an overbearing, intellectual father in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and Woolf's difficult relationship with her own father, or the heartbreaking death of the mother in *The Years* (1937) and how Woolf remembers her mother's death in *A Sketch of the Past* (1976). However, we can never hear Woolf's authorial voice in her fiction. She transforms her own experiences into significant and paradigmatic moments in human life by stripping personal layers from her fiction. Thus, fiction and literature are the place in which experience becomes multiple and collective. This transversal quality of Woolf's writing becomes even more potent if we consider that she (much like Cixous would do later) fictionalises her essays, creating narrative voices that erase any authoritative mark or authorial "I", which renders their experiences and emotions impersonal (though never neutral). Fiction becomes the site of investigation. We may think, for example, of Woolf's Marys in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), who gathered in themselves the collective experience of women of the past.

This notion of a sentence that wants to cut across identities and personalities certainly echoes T.S. Eliot's impersonal theory in his renowned *Tradition and the Individual Talent*

(1919), though, in Chapter 1, we have seen how Woolf's "tradition" differs from her friend Eliot's. Eliot too defends that true poets should not reveal any trace of personality in their works. According to Eliot, poets are not measured by what they have to say in terms of opinions or personal values, but by the ability of serving as a medium for the impressions that come into their minds to, then, translate them into words, as he declares *In:* "the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways" (ELIOT, 1919, p. 155).

Cixous seems to agree with Eliot's ideas when it comes to an impersonal writing. Firstly, according to the author, fiction is a place, or rather, a "non-place", in which possibilities would emerge beyond one's single identity, where new formulations of language would give place to unimagined, multiple subjectivities, creating, thus, a domain that stretches beyond the Symbolic, or as she puts it in "First Names of No One", a domain for the "plureal" (1974a, p. 28). Therefore, in this writing – more specifically, feminine writing – there would be no place for a self-absorbed, egocentric "I" in the "non-place" of fiction, for such a (masculine) narrative voice and its sentence would not be committed to expressing adventure, life and desire, but only to consuming its objects, being thus related to death itself.

In this sense, in "First Names of No One" (1974), Cixous establishes that the writing of "No one", or *Personne* in its original French, exudes with life since it allows for multiplicity, as opposed to that of the "Great proper", or *Propre*, which only encapsulates and kills the *other*. Interestingly, the French word *Personne* can be both used to signify "no one" and "person". It is a feminine noun, preceded and marked by the feminine article *La* whenever it carries the definite meaning of "person", and holds precisely the notions of impersonality and individuality amongst its significations at the same time; we could, thus, approximate *Personne's* writing to the feminine sentence and to feminine language itself. Meanwhile, *Propre* holds the notion of property in its name, entailing, thus, the possession and ownership that can be related to a masculine sentence and a masculine language. Moreover, *Propre* also means "clean" in French, echoing the idea that a masculine sentence does not allow the waste and the remnants of the unconscious to come to light.

What Cixous seems to defend, then, is that *Personne's* writing – as the graphed voice of *écriture féminine* – is committed to expressing life because it knows that by being a feminine no one, we can give life to anyone, generating instead of killing difference. We can embrace all kinds of subjectivities and allow the most diverse subjects to spring from *Personne*'s voice; a voice that does not bar the imagination, but rather proliferates the many

roles it encounters in the memory of language. As Cixous herself puts it, “It is no one, always more than one, who is the ‘diverse hero’ of all the works whose story is told here, a subject capable of being all those which it will be, desiring infinity, put at risk far from a central ego, and irrepressible” (1974a, p. 29). We could conclude, then, that such a narrative voice is precisely the one which is able to put forth what Virginia Woolf considers to be the “new vehicle” for writing.

3 **MAKING THE SCENE OF ANDROGYNY: A "NEW VEHICLE" FOR WRITING**

> But there may be some state of mind in which one could continue without effort because nothing is required to be held back. And this perhaps, I thought, coming in from the window, is one of them. For certainly when I saw the couple get into the taxicab the mind felt as if, after being divided, it had come together again in a natural fusion. The obvious reason would be that it is natural for the sexes to co-operate. One has a profound, if irrational, instinct in favour of the theory that the union of man and woman makes for the greatest satisfaction, the most complete happiness.
>
> *Virginia Woolf*

> Text: my body – shot through with streams of song: I don't mean the overbearing, clutch "mother" but, rather, what touches you, the equivoice that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your fierce; the rhythm that laughs you; the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable; body (body? Bodies?) no more describable than god, the soul, or the Other;
>
> *Hélène Cixous*

In chapter one, we have seen how the modernist scene flipped expectations of genre and how Woolf gendered this discussion by denouncing the masculine tradition that permeated the literary canon. In this chapter, we shall have a closer look at the question of poetic inflections and how Woolf advocates for the conjoining of the beauty of poetry and the materiality of prose in order to create different kinds of genres that could surpass or supplant the novel. We also observe how the poetic text is composed by phonic and acoustic traces and how the influence of voice relates to the maternal metaphor in Cixous's poetics. As we dwell on this topic, we shall further investigate it through Adriana Cavarero's idea of a maternal *chora* and the enunciation of the poetic text. Finally, if Woolf and Cixous gender the question of language in order to produce the demise of binary oppositions reinforced by phallogocentric logic, we shall now observe how Woolf formulates androgyny as the ultimate way to destabilise patriarchy and phallogocentrism. By doing so, this study will show why the non-essentialist feminist approach to matters of gender is indeed at the heart of Woolf's androgynous poetics.

Firstly, it is important to remember that Woolf declares in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) that the first prominent women writers chose the novel and prose to express themselves due to their upbringing and experiences in the household environment, as it was the case for Jane Austen, George Eliot, the Brontë sisters and so on. However, Woolf remarks that the first impulse for women in literature was to write poetry instead of prose (1929, p. 92), as if the woman writer had some intrinsic desire to express herself in poetic terms. She brings up Anne Finch, also known as Lady Winchilsea (1929, p. 83), and Margaret Cavendish, also known as the Duchess of Newcastle-upon-Tyne (p. 87), as examples of women's early attempts at writing poetry. Both were 17th century women, members of the aristocracy and, above all, both had to practice their writing in secrecy. For Woolf, even though their choice was poetry, these women incurred on the same error Charlotte Brontë did: they wrote in anger about the sufferings and misfortunes they experienced as women, that is, "in both burnt the same passion for poetry and both are disfigured and deformed by the same causes. Open the duchess and one finds the same outburst of rage (…)" (WOOLF, 1929, p. 87).

However, if women took to prose around the 18th century, it did not seem to mean that they abandoned poetry entirely. According to Woolf, those women who were indeed able to write without the impediment of anger, and thus, without the shadow of the 'I 'on the page, managed to write their prose poetically, since they embraced a collective point of view and multiple subjectivities. This could be the reason why, in Woolf's opinion, Jane Austen "with less genius for writing than Charlotte Bronte, she got infinitely more said" (1929, p. 106), as she states in *A Room of One's Own.* This also seems to be the reason why Woolf considers Emily Brontë "a greater poet than Charlotte", as she affirms in "Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights" (1925, n.p). They seem to have achieved a way of detaching their particular personalities from the narrative in place of something broader and more complex, that is, the ability of reaching different people in different ages. In Woolf's words,

> The meaning of a book, which lies so often apart from what happens and what is said and consists rather in some connection which things in themselves different have had for the writer, is necessarily hard to grasp. Especially this is so when, like the Brontes, the writer is poetic, and his meaning inseparable from his language, and itself rather a mood than a particular observation (1925, n.p.).

Then, the poetic inflections Emily Bronte achieves in her prose, for example, could bring forth the potentiality of transforming language as it is in the masculine order, it could lead to

the demise of the dominant ego, and finally, it could express a feminine sentence. This approximation to feminine writing is what would allow for an openness to the *other,* and, thus, it would call forth an ungendered writing for the future, one that becomes androgynous. It certainly reminds us of Italian philosopher Rosi Braidotti's notion of the intensive genre she identifies in Woolf's writing through its capacity of erasing the ego and undoing gender and genre themselves.

According to Woolf, even the novel in itself was an outdated genre for women to convey their experiences, for it would be already tainted with marks of a masculine language, since it had been broadly used by a masculine canon and tradition. Therefore, articulating poetic inflections in prose narratives could generate this new genre fit to encompass aspects of the feminine experience and mind (1929, p. 106). After all, to the author, women had been barred from expressing themselves poetically due to the moral codes that informed historical constructions of femininity, which women themselves internalised as that ideal which Woolf called the Angel in the House in "Professions for Women" (1931). In Woolf's words in *A Room,* "no doubt we shall find her knocking that into shape for herself when she has the free use of her limbs; and providing *some new vehicle, not necessarily verse, for the poetry in her*. For it is the poetry that is still denied outlet" (1929, p. 106, our emphasis). Then, poetry could, indeed, allow for rearrangements in language and figures of speech that would present through words the depths of the feminine unconscious, setting it free (if only momentarily, through the active imagination of a world to come) from phallogocentric logic.

Thus, to write poetically could function as a gateway for that impersonal narrative voice that Woolf, Eliot – even though the impersonal voice in Eliot seems to be broadly masculine, as we have argued in the first chapter – and Cixous seem to defend. We might say that bringing poetic inflections to other genres, such as the novel, for example, would mean an escape from the ties of consumption that bind the language of the "Great Proper". The language of *Personne,* then, is a language that ungenres and ungenders the sites that it produces in the process of writing: texts, affirmative fictions, investigative combinations materialised by the written word.

In "An Exchange with Hélène Cixous", a 1984 interview, Cixous declared that she preferred to highlight the poetic aspect in her essays rather than to be overly political, since, according to Cixous, what we understand as political discourse is marked by phallogocentric rationality. Thinking poetically, then, would be precisely the instrument to challenge the

masculine, rational language she tries to disturb. Abigail Bray explains this poetic impulse when she affirms that:

> For Cixous it is perhaps more important to 'put the accent on the poetic', for 'the poetic 'is precisely that which rationality attempts to repress and it is the very repression of 'the poetic 'which is thought to lead to violence. The poetic is the domain of the excess, the unconscious, the body, sexuality, creativity, the feminine, all the political attempts to limit and contain through the application of 'hard 'and 'cruel 'reason. (BRAY, 2004, p. 15)

The same could be affirmed about Woolf, for whom politics too is elaborated in the realm of poetic fiction, at the level of the sentence. Moreover, as Woolf herself declared, poetry need not be expressed "necessarily in verse", as we have mentioned before, which shows her attempt to undo the genres and escape their constrictions.

In "Poetry, Fiction and the Future" (1927), for example, Woolf discusses the specificities and differences between poetry and prose. According to her, the poets of her age could not menage to express their conflicts, fears and doubts in the form of lyrical poetry. For them, prose would become the main means of expression, since, as Woolf declares, prose can harness in its form the banality and the material facts of life. We might understand, then, that Woolf seems to exhort modern artists to search for a new form and genre that could combine the lyricism of poetry with the ugliness and practicality of an era rife with conflicts, or as she states in "The New Biography" (1927), to produce "the perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow" (1927, n.p.), that is, to find a way to conjoin the suggestiveness of poetry to the material of prose.

Still in "Poetry, Fiction and the Future" (1927), Woolf demonstrates that a poet must have a certain "attitude to life" (p. 3) if they are to express themselves poetically. She admits it to be a vague statement (WOOLF, 1927, p. 3), but we may interpret it as a stance adopted by poets who are aware of and open to external impressions in order to strike the reader with a transformative emotion. Interestingly enough, Woolf resorts to Elizabethan drama in order to exemplify her argument, as this formative period in English literature would reveal a form that was able to capture and disclose such an attitude of poetic expression: "(…) we must reply that there was a form once, and it was not the form of lyrical poetry; it was the form of the drama, of the poetic drama of the Elizabethan age" (1927, p. 2). Therefore, we may affirm that it is not a question of poetry as a genre, but of poetic inflections in genres in order to devise a new form of expression.

Woolf praises Emily Brontë for her capacity of attaining a poetic prose. We could say that, though differently, Woolf achieves such an effect in her own writing as a novelist as well. We may recall her difficulty in classifying her own novels in her diaries, since "novel" alone, as a genre, did not encompass the poetic attempts with which she imbued them. She often evokes different genres to define them, as we see in one of her entries in 1925 when writing *To the Lighthouse* (1927): "But while I try to write, I am making up to *To the Lighthouse* – the sea is to be heard all through it. I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel'. A new … by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?" (n.p.). *The Waves* (1931), which Woolf terms a "play-poem", also comes to mind, as it breaks with the formal characteristics of prose and aims at a poetic account of six different individuals as they subjectively apprehend the world around them. In one of her diary entries of 1927, when she still thought about calling it *The moths,* she remarks upon the desire of conflating genres and creating something new that would surpass constrictions: "Now *The Moths* will I think fill out the skeleton which I dashed in here; the play-poem idea; the idea of some continuous stream, not solely of human thought, but of the ship, the night etc, all flowing together: intersected by the arrival of the bright moth" (n.p.). Thus, *The Waves* transgresses its genre in a number of ways — be it by creating basic rhythmic structures in sections of the novel, which has allowed critics such as Hermione Lee to reconstruct them in verse, or by interspersing the soliloquies of the six speaking characters, among other dramatic marks, with interludes (LEE, 2010). This could certainly bring forth the playfulness with language, syntax and grammar that a more realist narrative would need to do without.

One of Woolf's most interesting accomplishments in *The Waves* (1931), however, is how it challenges the formation of identity and suggests the multiplicity of the self. As we have discussed before, modernist discussions of poetry as a genre would encourage poets to abandon their personalities in order to acquire a collective and multiple point of view. A novel that aims to be poetic would also subscribe to such a notion, as Pinho, reading Jean-Paul Sartre, informs us: "A poetic novel, then, would be one that abandons the clarity of prose and launches itself into the shadows of poetry. Such a novel demands a writer who is willing to die as a poet in the lose-win game that poetry entails"[10] (PINHO, 2015, p. 144).

[10]Um romance poético, então, seria um romance que abdica da total claridade da prosa e se lança às sombras da poesia.

We may argue, then, that *The Waves* (1931) rejects a linear account of time and a realist model of prose in favour of a narrative that highlights senses and perceptions, as poetry would require — and, as we have seen in Chapter 1, reading *The Waves* as such demands that we, as critics, read modernism neither as a historical period nor as a new form of realism. That would, in turn, represent a challenge to "the logical, unified subjectivity" that Woolf's male predecessors strove to establish in traditional literature, as Woolfian critic Makiko Minow-Pinkey argues in *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (1987, p. 166). Furthermore, we can also notice that the six friends that speak in the novel are traces of a tentative collective voice that is fragmented into these six different individuals, which questions the idea of a unitary selfhood. As Minow-Pinkey concludes, the narrative could advocate for a multiple, diverse, heterogeneous self rather than a single, uniform one (1987, p. 168).

Therefore, with her seventh novel, Woolf not only challenges the notion of an egocentrical self, but also the understanding of the very form of the novel. Her predecessors were indeed strong defenders of an articulated non-fragmented subject constructed in linear narratives that favoured the idea of progress. We could affirm, then, that Woolf's choice of creating poetic inflections into her narrative voices brings her closer to a feminine perspective against the logical phallogocentric order that dominated the literary canon, gendering, thus, the question of genre. As Minow-Pinkey demonstrates,

> The very frustration that such effects produce in the reader testifies to the deeply ingrained forces of those conventions of plot and sequence which the novel regards as produced by the 'totalitarism 'of the logocentic mind. Woolf defines the modern age as 'an age incapable of sustained effort, littered with fragments '(…) Her dissatisfaction with the literary tradition and its contemporary Edwardian representatives is by now gender-specific, not generational. Though fragmentation of the psyche is the general experience of modernity, the woman writer sees it as a positive force of heterogeneity, unlike her male counterparts who tend to look nostalgically back to some pre-Renaissance 'unified sensibility '(1987, p. 168).

In this sense, we notice that Woolf challenges the male logic and reason through language by devising a new sentence, one that dares to expand the single meaning of words and to chase after the traces amassed by them over time. What results from this is a narrative freed from the shadow of the "I" on the page, distant from a pervasive ego, able, thus, to account for a feminine experience and the once unelaborated feminine unconscious, in order to allow for multiple subjectivities and individualities. In other words, using language in the feminine through fiction, then, is Woolf's first movement, or as Deleuze would word it, a first

"plateau" of identification, in the pursuit of an androgynous writing. She finds her *sortie* in poetic prose, which mixes and confuses the stability of literary genres, once safeguarded by the masculine literary tradition from discussions of gender.

From Woolf to Cixous, one begins to have glimpses of what, indeed, would happen to the phallogocentric order if the structure of language itself were challenged by feminine writing.

3.1" **The first voice of love": The Voice of the Poetic Text and the Maternal Metaphor**

We have observed how poetic inflections emerge in Woolf's oeuvre to destabilise fixed notions of genre. In this section, we shall see how the poetic text is constructed and how feminine writing employs the figure of the mother in order to access the pre-Oedipal state in which mother and child are deeply connected – that is, when the child recognises itself as a continuation of the mother, as if they were not separate beings –, and the Law of the Father has not yet imposed the limits of individuation through language. In this sense, the feminine poetic text will be pervaded by the acoustic sphere instead of accepting the primacy of a masculine grammar, which permeates Phallologocentric language. In *The Insistence of Dethroning the Self, the Transition Towards Literature: The Movements of Hélène Cixous's work* (2020), Cixousian scholar Flavia Trocoli affirms that, for Cixous, feminine writing is "traversed both by the privilege of voice, with special emphasis on rhythm and song, (…) and by the undecidability of the French verb '*voler*' which, intransitively, means to fly, and, transitively, means to steal"[11] (2020, p. 190). With this in mind, we shall turn to contemporary philosopher Adriana Cavarero's comment on the "maternal chora" in order to establish the connection between the maternal and the acoustic sphere of the voice, revealing how feminine writing flies away from processes of individuality while it steals from the restricted meanings constructed by masculine language. Cavarero (2005) draws from the ideas of French philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva in her *La Révolution du Langage Poétique* (1974), in which she dedicates a chapter to analyse and investigate the phonic effects in poetic

[11] "(...) é atravessada tanto por um privilégio da voz, com ênfase no ritmo e no canto (...) quanto pela indecidibilidade do verbo 'voler' que, em Francês, significa, intransitivamente, voar, e transitivamente, roubar".

language from classical forms of verse to modern texts, with special emphasis on French poet Mallarmé's verse.

In *The Maternal Chora; or, the Voice of the Poetic Text* (2005), Cavarero correlates acoustic pleasure and the pre-Oedipal phase, since, according to her, this would be a state in which language and civilisation have not yet formed the child's notion of self.Therefore, in the pre-Oedipal state, the child's vocality is not organised by the semantic speech imposed by the language of the Father, being thus free to explore all the "untamed sounds" their vocality is capable to produce (CAVARERO, 2005, p. 132). Cavarero states that this is precisely why thinkers from the French psychoanalyst tradition like Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous are interested in investigating the connection between the vocal sphere and the pre-Oedipal state, since for them, vocality can be traced back to "the originary scene in which the fusional relationship between mother and child also works to frustrate the category of the individual" (2005, p. 131). We could interpret, then, that in the pre-Oedipal state, there is a connection between mother and voice which challenges the formation of the Self, or the identitary *I*, constructed by language.

In this sense, Cavarero evokes Kriteva's notion of the *semiotic chora* to account for the remnants of this primal, pre-verbal vocal freedom which survives in the adult's unconscious mind in the form of "rhythmic and vocalic drives" (2005, p. 133), since this unconscious musicality would be deeply embedded in one's body, as it recalls the bond between mother and child, originated in the pre-Oedipal phase. Indeed, in *La Révolution du Langage Poétique* (1974), Kristeva affirms that the *semiotic chora* does not represent a sort of "universal phonetism" (*phonétisme universel*), common to every language, but is rather a pre-phonematic state (*état pré-phonématique*), since "we could observe that children who had not yet acquired the sounds of a given language could produce every possible (non-linguistic) sound"[12] (1974, p. 221 – 222). Moreover, as it happens with the child's untamed speech, the *semiotic chora* has no allegiance to the current logical organisation of language. According to Cavarero,

> This semiotic *chora* has a profound bodily root and is linked to the indistinct totality of mother and child. It precedes the symbolic system of language, or the sphere of

[12]... qu'on peut constater chez les enfants n'ayant pas encore acquis les sons d'une langue mais pouvant produire tous les sons (non-linguistiques) possible.

> the semantic where syntax and the concept rule – the paternal order of the separation between the self and the other, between mother and child, and between signifier and signified (2005, p. 133).

The effects of what Kristeva and Cavarero understand as chora, therefore, would be perceived in language as disconnected, illogical speech once it comes from the depths of the unconscious mind. Here, we might recall Bray's discussion of Lacan's *jouissance*, since the chora would also reproduce breaks and cracks in the paternal, symbolic language. In the *semiotic chora*, however, these unconscious breaks happen on the acoustic level. In Cavarero's words, "The semiotic drives of the phonic thus find some fissures through which to invade language and disturb it with the agitation of its rhythms" (2005, p. 133).

Although the chora belongs to the realm of the phonic pleasure of voice, Cavarero highlights that there is no opposition between voice and writing, but rather between voice and language, that is, the language engendered by the patriarchal system with all its rules and grammar. On the contrary, writing, for Cavarero, is voice's ally in the effort to subvert and destabilise the codes of patriarchal language, as she explains: "voice and writing here come together against a certain systematic and normative conception of language" (2005, p. 132). Thus, the Italian philosopher clarifies that when the written text is permeated, or as she puts it, "penetrated" (p. 132) by voice, what emerges from this connection is the poetic text (2005, p. 132). In this sense, the text penetrated by voice, that is, the poetic text, is different from any other text because of its capacity of expressing unconscious bodily drives, or as Kristeva puts it while discussing Mallarmé's poetry, "the poetic language in general, and the modern [literary] text in particular, give back to language one of its most repressed virtual capacities: that of infusing 'passion'into meaning"[13] (1974, p. 227).

Cavarero affirms that the acoustic is deeply rooted in the body." Unlike thought, which tends to reside in the immaterial otherworld of ideas, speech is always a question of bodies, filled with drives, desires and blood", Cavarero formulates: the "voice vibrates, the tongue moves" (2005, p. 134). The interest in the libidinal register of the voice is also a theme that pervades Cixous's oeuvre. As mentioned before, voice has a privileged role in Cixous's scene. Therefore, we return to her 1976 "manifesto-like" essay "The Laugh of the Medusa":

[13]"... le langage poétique em général, et le texte moderne em particulier, restituent au langage une de ses capacités virtuelles mais refoulées: celle de faire passer les 'passions' dans le sens...

> She doesn't "speak", she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she *inscribes* what she's saying, because she doesn't deny the drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking (1976, p. 881).

And, as clarified by Cavarero, voice and writing also work together for Cixous. According to the Algerian thinker, feminine writing does not encourage the separation between orality and written text since it does not deny the drives from the unconscious. Cixousdefends that the masculine text, however, is bound to and by the grammar and syntax of patriarchal language (1976, p. 881). Therefore, it masks the drives and impulses repressed into the unconscious mind, which, for both Cixous and Cavarero, results in the separation between orality and text. As Cixous explains, "There is not that scission [in the feminine text], that division made by the common man between the logic of oral speech and the logic of the text, bound as he is by his antiquated relation – servile, calculating – to mastery" (1976, p. 881).

In this sense, Cixous also realises that the patriarchal system encourages not only the separation between orality and writing, but also from mother and child, resulting in the process of individuation and the creation of the self. What the text produced by a feminine writing would entail, then, would be moments of return to a pre-Oedipal state, where m/other is not external but rather a constituent part of oneself, through traces of voice and musicality. Cixous states, then, that by conjoining the orality inherited by the first voice of the mother and the written word, the feminine writer writes in "white ink", alluding to maternal milk:

> In women's speech, as in their writing, that element which never stops resonating, which, once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us – that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman. Why this privileged relationship with the voice? Because no woman stock piles as many defenses for countering the drives as does a man. You don't build walls around yourself, you don't forego pleasure as "wisely" as he. Even if phallic mystification has generally contaminated good relationships, a woman is never far from "mother" (I mean outside her role functions: the "mother" as nonname and as source of goods). There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink (1976, p. 881).

Once again, resuming our previous discussion on poetic inflections, we are met with the understanding that the feminine text and that feminine writing encourage the interweaving of genres. Firstly, Cavarero comments that, within the poetic text, poetry is indeed, "the most efficacious example of this" (2005, p. 137), as she reads Kristeva's interpretation of "verse" as

being a displacement of prose's linearity, and therefore, a challenge to normative notions of language (*idem*). However, poetic language – to use Kristeva's term – is not restricted to poetry as a genre. Indeed, it is constitutive of any text penetrated by the unconscious drives of voice. According to Cavarero,

> (…) verse and prose flow together in the musicality of the poetic text.
>
> In Kristeva's words, this is a text that is poetic over and beyond the genres and classifications of literary canons. It does not matter if this text is written or oral; strictly speaking, the poetic text is every text in which the semiotic rhythm erupts into the symbolic system of language, breaking down its borders and inundating it with phonic pleasures (2005, p. 137 – 138).

As we follow Cavarero's reading of Kristeva, we notice that the fact that the written text is capable of capturing sound and the drives that come with it is indeed one of the reasons which renders poetic language revolutionary. According to Cavarero, the phonemes are the textual and linguistic signs which materialise the drives of the body into language. In Kristeva's own words, "(…) the phonemes take back that which the sounds have lost as they became sounds of a given language: they take back the topography of the body that is reproduced on them"[14] (1974, p. 222). Thus, if we think of feminine writing as the poetic text par excellence, it becomes clear how it expresses the experiences and memories of the body. In this sense, we return to Trocoli's affirmation which opened this section on the privilege of voice and the double play on the French verb *voler* that Cixous proposes: just as the phonemes enact our flight back to the unconscious drives of the body, feminine writing stealsback these drives and passions from the petrified meanings of patriarchal language so as to impregnate them with new, multiple meanings. As they do so, they *fly* away from the bounds of masculine ego and *stealinto* the freedom of a diverse subjectivity. As Cixous declares in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976):

> Flying is a woman's gesture – flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we've been able to possess anything by flying; we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. It is no accident that *voler* has a double meaning, that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense (1976, p. 887).

[14] "(...) les phonèmes reprennent ce que les sons ont perdu en devenant sons d'une langage donné: ils reprennent la topographie du corps qui s'y reproduit.

As we have discussed in the previous sections, Virginia Woolf imbues all of her writing with poetic language, which challenges not only the barriers between genres, but patriarchal language itself. In this sense, since we have established the connection between poetic writing and voice/acoustic pleasure, it would be possible to affirm that sonority and voice hold a significant place in Woolf's oeuvre. Flavia Trocoli sheds light on the matter as she analyses the connection between the interludes and the monologues of *The Waves* (1931) in *A Inútil Paixão do Ser: Figurações do narrador Moderno* (2015). Trocoli declares that the non-subjectification that takes place throughout the interludes – that is, the moments in which the narrative voice appraises the landscape with no specific Self or *I* who sees it – slips into the characters 'discourses in the monologues. It means to say that characters themselves, now emptied of a dominant Self, become "Pure voice and pure gaze"[15] (TROCOLI, 2015, p. 74). The Brazilian scholar proceeds to highlight the effects sonority and rhythm produce in the novel, and how it relates to the poetic voice that runs throughout the narrative. One of the procedures Woolf employs to create an acoustic effect through writing is alliteration, which, according to Trocoli, creates a sound quality that shatters the unity of the word and challenges the myth of unified meaning (2015, p. 75). Thus,

> (…) the unsurmountable and sounded word coming from the Interludes directs the functioning of the Monologues. In *The Waves*, words produce movement and not meanings as in *PSGH*[16]. And once meaning is subtracted from a word, what rests is only voice. Poetic voice.[17] (TROCOLI, 2015, p. 75)

Although it is certainly a novel in which the poetic and the sonorous play a pivotal part, *The Waves* (1931) is not the only work in which Woolf explores the poetic effect of sound. Adriana Cavarero remarks that the chora is a site of indiscernibility, of difficult definition, "deprived of every material and conceptual form" (2005, p. 134), and, in this sense, due to its impossible conceptualisation, the chora remains out of the Symbolic system of language. This definition could remind us of an episode in Woolf's 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway,* in which character Peter Walsh is wondering through the London streets when he

[15] "Pura voz e puro olhar".
[16] *Paixão Segundo G.H* (1964), by Brazilian author Clarice Lispector.
[17] "(...) a palavra incontornável e sonorizada proveniente dos Interlúdios dita o funcionamento dos Monólogos. Em *The Waves*, as palavras são produtoras de movimento e não produtoras de significações como em *PSGH*. E uma vez que da palavra se subtraiu o significado, resta a voz. Voz poética".

faces a peculiar figure: an old woman, probably a beggar, singing undefined and indistinct words of what could be a love song. Woolf sets the scene as follows:

> A sound interrupted him; a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning into
>
> ee um fah um so
> foo swee too eem oo –
>
> the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth; which issued, just opposite Regent's Park Tube Station, from a tall quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump, like a wind-beaten tree for ever barren of leaves which lets the wind run up and down its branches singing
>
> ee um fah so
> foo swee too eem oo,
>
> and rocks and creaks and moans in the eternal breeze.
> Through all ages – when the pavement was grass, when it was a swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise – the battered woman – for she wore a skirt – with her right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of love (1925, p. 80 – 81).

In the excerpt above, Woolf seems to have, indeed, fictionalised Cavarero's notion of chora. Just as the chora, Woolf's beggar is deprived of all form: "she" has no age, no sex, and stands as a tall "quivering shape" from which a voice issues its phonemes. The sounds she produces are inexplainable as well, classified as not even human sounds, which renders the ageless and sexless voice of this character ungraspable by the Symbolic. Furthermore, the choric song of this shape is ancient, having echoed in the primal ages of "tusk and mammoth", which evokes Cavarero's discussion of the primal origins of the chora as an immemorial voice that might only be remembered through the drives that come into speech as sounds breaking the phallologocentric grammar and syntax. Finally, Woolf signals that this im/memorial voice which sings love and interrupts the course of a masculine-driven world is feminine. Although the singing shape is described as having no sex, she bears the performative signs of a woman through her attire – a skirt –, which could indicate that feminine writing is a sort of gateway for the undefinable, for that which will cut the patriarchal language and logic asunder, a space in expansion for the utmost alterity, for no/anyone. Woolf seems to be telling her readers, then, that the poetic voice – the one which will tear down the barriers of genre, language and patriarchy – is the frail quivering sound of a battered homeless woman.

3.2 *Écriture Féminine* in the Scene of Androgyny

Throughout these chapters, we have discussed how writing is a powerful outlet to destabilise, defamiliarise and disturb the masculine word. As we enter our last section, we turn now to what we believe is Woolf's proposal for changing the patriarchal system that rules her society: androgyny. We shall observe that for Woolf, androgyny is a matter of textual poetics, which would indicate that literature and fiction are the ideal locus for harnessing and promoting such a change. In this sense, we call upon scholar Davi Pinho to suggest how androgyny is activated in Woolf's oeuvre and how it relates to Cixous's *écriture féminine*. We shall also dwell on Rosi Braidotti's notion of "intensive genre" and "intensive text" to establish the potency of the androgynous text. Finally, we investigate to which degree Cixous's concept of "other bisexuality" relates to Woolf's androgyny. Thus, going back to where we started, through the "scene of writing" we may begin to visualise "what would happen to logocentrism, to the great philosophical systems, to the order of the world in general if the rock upon which they founded this church should crumble?" (CIXOUS, 1996, p. 65). When the "rock" crumbles, what we see left in its place is not a single subject who owns the word and erects reason, but multiple subjectivities that come to light through "the feminine" in language. To commit to a feminine writing means to allow for excesses to emerge, for feminine *jouissance* to overflow, for the unconscious to irrupt, all inscribed in the poetic feminine which has been repressed throughout history.

Although *écriture féminine* by itself already poses a threat to the phallogocentric system by producing disturbances in language, we may consider it as a first movement, or a first "plateau", without the dominant "I" on the page, to what Woolf would conceive as androgyny. Therefore, through writing the scene of *écriture féminine*, the mind is finally open to allow for the perceptions and external impressions to break in without the impediment of fixed gendered identities.

In the last chapter of *A Room of One's own* (1929), Woolf describes a scene that takes place on 26 October 1928, her "present day", in which the narrator, sitting by the window " –a constant trope in Woolf's oeuvre, a threshold that delimits our internal negotiations and the linguistic projections of our subjective view onto the world – our constant folding and

unfolding, as Gilles Deleuze would theorize in his reading of Michel Foucault" (PINHO, 2017, p. 109) – observes the street and collects her perceptions of the London landscape. Then, a man and a woman come into the stage, coming from each side of the street after a moment of suspension. They share a taxicab, and then everything resumes its movement:

> 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. Now it was bringing from one side of the street to the other diagonally a girl in patent leather boots, and then a young man in a maroon overcoat; it was also bringing a taxi-cab; and it brought all three together at a point directly beneath my window; where the taxi stopped; and the girl and the young man stopped; and they got into the taxi; and then the cab glided off as if it were swept on by the current elsewhere (1929, p. 129).

Thus, the players in this scene – a man and a woman who represent the binomial masculine/feminine as roles in the Phallocentric Performing Theatre – seem to merge inside the non-human taxicab as a sign of androgyny. Woolf seems to indicate that only through an androgynous mind can the constrictions of writing under the rule of gender disappear, making one free to express/imagine a different experience. Being free to express such an experience for the empirical woman would be, then, in a phallogocentric society, a triumph over years and years of constraints imposed by reason and language as they are dominated by patriarchy. In this sense, this is why we believe that androgyny, far from signalling a lack of feminist positioning, as some consider it, is a true liberation from the signs constructed by a masculine egocentric language that only imprisons its objects. The common ground Woolf attempts to reach at the end of *A Room* might be read as one of the most pressing feminist and queer questions of our times.

In this sense, we could ask ourselves how androgyny would be achieved in writing. For Davi Pinho, the answer lies in the desecration of the feminine. In his *Imagens do Feminino na Obra e Vida de Virginia Woolf* (2015), he resorts to Giorgio Agamben's notion of desecration or profanation, that is, of removing something from a sacred position of veneration and bringing it to daily use, to the public world. In this sense, "profanation marks the inverse movement of religious sacrifice: it is the return of objects from the divine realm

(sacred) to the human one (profane)"[18] (PINHO, 2015, p. 166). Therefore, here we recall the figure of the "Angel in the House" in" Professions for Women" (1931), as we have discussed in the previous chapter. We notice that both in Woolf's essay as in Coventry Patmore's Victorian poem, the figure of this homely and dedicated woman is surrounded by admiration. She is venerated as the utmost form of pure femininity, filled with innocence and sacrifice, and is to be protected from the dangers of the public world in the recesses of the home. For Woolf, there lies the impediment not only for women to write their experiences, as we have seen in chapter two, but also for women to achieve the androgynous mind, since the seclusion of the figure of the "Angel" in the private sphere of the house would refrain it from imprinting a mark in the public language.

Therefore, we begin to notice that, for women writers to release their mind from the impediment that the identification with this sacred ideal represented, killing the "Angel" entails restoring it to the public world, as Woolf does when she names this angelic ideal in her talk to the very "profane" National Society for Women's Service, which in turn would become an essay, the modernist forum for public discussions in the little magazines and the little books published by the Hogarth Press. For Woolf, although the characteristics that informed the figure of the "Angel" oppressed women, they also represented a different ideal from those of the masculine world. It is curious to notice that even though Woolf declared the need to kill it in "Professions for Women" (1931), as we have seen in the previous chapter, the "Angel" is reborn in her fiction only to be brought to ordinary life. In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), for example, the "Angel" is personified by Mrs. Ramsay, the wife, mother and hostess. In this case, as prophesied in "Professions for Women" (1931) the "Angel" has to die so that the woman artist, Lily Briscoe, may have her final vision. In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), however, now as the homonymous character Clarissa Dalloway, the "Angel" entertains the idea of dying, but as she watches a scene of an ordinary old woman living her ordinary life, she abandons the idea of suicide and resumes her place in the party, for she had realised she had a place in society, that is, to unite, to gather and to welcome people. This role seems ingrained in yet another "Angel": Mrs. Swithin in *Between the Acts* (1941) never thinks about dying. On the contrary, she takes the role of the welcoming hostess to its highest degree as

[18](...) a profanação marca o trânsito inverso ao do sacrifício religioso: ela é o retorno de objetos do campo divino (sagrado) para o humano (profano).

she embraces William Dodge, the outsider, the queer character otherwise excluded by most characters, as she seems to recognise and converse with him in their shared otherness.In this sense, the "Angel's" patience, silence, care and reception – characteristics historically related to the feminine – would oppose and complement the masculine's war-glorifying public and institutional language. Indeed, as Woolf declares in *Three Guineas* (1938), throughout History, women had been educated by private and silent teachers, in an "unpaid-for education" as she puts it (p. 202), that represented an opposition to the formal education men received at Universities, that is, the institutional education that would inform patriarchal discourses. In Woolf's words,

> (…) it seems undeniable that we were all educated by the same teachers. And those teachers, biography indicates, obliquely, and indirectly, but emphatically and indisputably none the less, were poverty, chastity, derision, and – but what word covers "lack of rights and privileges"? Shall we press the old word "freedom" once more into service? "Freedom from unreal loyalties", then, was the fourth of their teachers; that freedom from loyalty to old schools, old colleges, old churches, old ceremonies, old countries which all those women enjoyed, and which to a great extent, we still enjoy by the law and custom of England. We have no time to coin new words, greatly though the language is in need of them. Let "freedom from unreal loyalties" then stand for the fourth great teacher of the daughters of educated men (1938, p. 203).

Thus, besides affirming the need of rearranging masculine language, Woolf notes that women's semi-formal education has allowed them not to be restricted by any allegiance to formal institutions, which, for her, would be a great impediment for writing. According to Pinho, it is precisely this education that has allowed women not to be caught in the constrictions of the ego, or of the "*I* on the page" as Woolf declares in *A Room* (1929), which would, in turn, make them more open to an androgynous turn, in spite of its masculinist tradition, *andros* before *gynos* (2015, p. 183). In this sense, achieving androgyny in writing would come through removing the "Angel in the House" from the recesses of the home and into the public world so as to undermine the logic of a patriarchal world, *gynos* before *andros*. Thus, what we may conclude from this is that only when both masculine and feminine languages converse in the public world can androgyny thrive: "(…) by bringing feminine language to the world, both sentences", which Pinho understands to be preconceived cultural and linguistic *verdicts* that condition a woman's or a man's life and art, "cancel each other, and what remains is the androgynous. Androgyny, then, is humanity unveiled in Woolf, which we could only perceive through the ontological break that the feminine would entail in

the masculine language of progress"[19], something Woolf herself enacts by creating the poet that could have been, Judith Shakespeare, and making her a paradigm for this writing to come, as she goes back to Shakespeare's sister after the androgynous mind is activated (PINHO, 2015, p. 187). Thus, it is by bringing the feminine language to the light of the public world, by removing it from the seclusion of the private realm, that is, by desacralising and enunciating it, that it can finally pervade and dismantle the binary masculine language of the public world. Only then can this subversive modernist form of androgyny be achieved in a deferred (and queer) future.

As we have extensively discussed in the previous chapter, feminine writing is freed from a dominant ego, since it never assumed the position of subject in the phallologocentric discourse, but it rather was forced to the margins, to the position of object. In this sense, by not belonging to the centre, feminine writing has the capacity of becoming multitudes, of engendering and proliferating *otherness*, of embodying in itself different and multiple subjectivities that escape the very binary femininity/masculinity. For this reason, Pinho considers that Woolf sees the feminine as a way towards the androgynous mind. Therefore, Cixous's *écriture feminine* becomes an access point to androgyny through writing (PINHO, 2015, p. 190-191). Pinho further indicates that although androgyny and *écriture féminine* have several connecting points, Woolf's androgyny may be read as a different plateau when it comes to the destabilisation of the metaphysical binomial masculine/feminine, for Woolf's vocabulary flies towards the queer multiplicity of human alternatives, neither feminine nor masculine (PINHO, 2015, p. 177). By using the term "androgyny"Woolf makes clear that the feminine is no final goal for writing, but a plateau in achieving transnational, transcultural, transgenre and transgender destinations.

In chapter two, we have observed how form – or rather subverting traditional literary forms – is pivotal for feminine writing and its intent to change phallologocentric systems. It is through the poetic that feminine writing encourages and engenders change in the sensible world. So far, we have dedicated this chapter to discussing how feminine writing uses poetic inflections to conjure change in the patriarchal world. If we agree that feminine writing is the materialisation of an androgynous future through text, we may begin to devise a poetics of androgyny. In this sense, we could affirm that Woolf unites the aesthetic and the political by

[19] "(...) ao trazer a linguagem feminina para o mundo, ambas as sentenças se anulam, e o que fica é o andrógino. Androginia, então, é a humanidade desvelada em Woolf, esta que só conseguiríamos vislumbrar a partir da quebra ontológica que o feminino parece constituir na linguagem do progresso, masculina".

advocating for literature as the primary locus for androgyny, and therefore, as the locus for the demise of patriarchal language and society. Therefore, we could interpret that literature creates possibilities, it creates new worlds in which different subjectivities may materialise their existence. For Woolf, then, the text produced by an androgynous mind would entail real possibilities of change:

> (…) it is through writing that she sees such a possibility, it is through writing that it is born. In the writings of some men and women we could begin to perceive a world in which many other (subjects) talk.
> The androgynous mind is the possibility of a mind that is beyond the affirmation of the same and the denial of the other, and, in this sense, it is an affirmation, or effectuation, of difference[20] (PINHO, 2015, p. 188 – 189).

Thus, Woolf seems to state the power of the androgynous text. Here, we recall our discussion of Rosi Braidotti's intensive genre, since androgyny seems to be an example of that, or to use another of Braidotti's term, an intensive text. Reading Virginia Woolf's and Vita Sackville-West's letters to each other, Braidotti sees in their relationship such an intensity of desire and life that it is automatically transferred to Woolf's literature (2011, p. 157). This would be the force, then, of the intensive genre, a genre capable of producing multiple processes of becoming, as we discussed in chapter two. In this sense, for Braidotti, the intensive text is precisely the text that comes from intensive genre, a text which can bring about effective change to the symbolic world. In her own words, "The intensive text is an experimental site, a laboratory for the new in the sense of the actualization of experiments in becoming" (2011, p. 156).

Therefore, we could interpret that the androgynous mind would produce an intensive text since it entails the possibility for multiple subjectivities, or, to use Braidotti's vocabulary, multiple becomings. Moreover, according to the author, Vita and Virginia's relationship could be considered post-gender, since although it was deeply focused on sexuality, it did not restrict itself to performances of gender (2011, p. 167). In this sense, it could echo Woolf's concept of androgyny in writing. As Braidotti wonders,

[20] "(...) é na escrita que ela vê tal possibilidade, é na escrita que ela nasce. Na escrita de alguns homens e algumas mulheres há o vislumbre de um mundo onde muitos outros (sujeitos) falam.
A mente andrógina é a possibilidade de uma mente que esteja para além da afirmação do mesmo, e negação do outro, e nesse sentido ela é uma afirmação, ou efetivação, da diferença".

> An important question that can be raised here is: what happens to gender if sexuality is not based on oppositional terms? what happens when there is sexuality without the possibility of heterosexual or homosexual union? (MacCormack 2008). What happens is vitalist erotics, which includes intensive deterritorializations, unhealthy alliances, hybrid cross-fertilizations, productive anomalies, and generative encounters (2011, p. 167).

As we have seen so far, Cixous also relates writing to the matter of gender. In "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) the Algerian thinker defends that writing entails a bisexual movement. When Cixous declares that writing is bisexual, however, she does not employ the term as it is commonly used, as in a perfectly merged being, with both equal parts of feminine and masculine so that it becomes neuter. For her, this would be "a fantasy of a total being" formed by two halves (CIXOUS, 1976, p. 884), as in the androgynous myth narrated by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*. To oppose this overly diffused concept of bisexuality, Cixous devises "the other bisexuality", which neither denies feminine or masculine desires nor forms a neuter being, but rather gives birth to a third sexuality; not being captured by phallologocentric modes of representation, Cixous's "other bisexuality" is not restricted to performing feminine and masculine subjectivities only. On the contrary, it opens itself to the discovery of multiple subjectivities and encourages difference rather than denies it. As she explains it,

> Bisexuality: that is, each one's location in self (*réperage en soi*) of the presence – variously manifest and insistent according to each person, male or female – of both sexes, nonexclusion either of the difference or of one sex, and, from this "self-permission", multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body (1976, p. 884).

Since writing, for Cixous, is feminine, as we have been discussing so far, she concludes that the feminine writer is necessarily bisexual (1976, p. 884). It means to say that the bisexual writer is the one who does not limit their works to the expression of a single subjectivity but is rather free and able to express multiple points of view. Although this definition is close to Woolf's androgyny, a Cixousian interpretation of bisexuality could believe Woolf's defence of the androgynous mind to be a rendition of the bisexual as a perfectly merged being. The scene in *A Room* (1929) where a man and a woman enter the taxicab together could be seen, according to this approach, as a merging of male and female towards a neuter or universal human expression. Indeed, Abigail Bray notices this criticism as she states that

> Her [Cixous's] argument about bisexuality echoes some of the criticism directed against Virginia Woolf's celebration of androgyny. For Woolf, androgyny represented a third type of sexual being who was free from the constraints of both masculinity and femininity. As several critics pointed out, this amounted to the erasure of the positive specificities of female subjectivity while also celebrating the sexually neutral subject, which has historically been the ex-nominated space of the masculine subject in the sense that this subject has historically been masked by ideologies of impartial reason and so on (2004, p. 51).

However, we believe that a careful reading of Woolf's subversion of androgyny may show otherwise. Unlike some critics' assumptions, Woolf does not advocate for a neutralisation of the feminine or the masculine as embodied and embedded positions, but rather aims at disarticulating the binary oppressions of these cultural positions in language. What hinders creativity and fiction (and life) for Woolf is precisely the enclosure within one of these (culturally constructed) poles, which merely reinforces its binary opposition to the other, limiting therefore diverse queer experiences and expressions. Therefore, to affirm that Woolf's androgyny entails an erasure of the woman's body does not seem aligned with her arguments at all. As she very clearly demonstrates,

> And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us *two powers preside, one male, one female*; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating. If one is a man, still the woman part of his brain must have effect; and a woman also must *have intercourse with* the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that *the mind is fully fertilized and uses its faculties.* Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, I thought (1929, p. 131-132, our emphasis).

Instead of a universal erasure of difference, Woolf's "fusion" partakes in a metaphorical complex of sexual acts (which are transitory and discontinuous moments of *jouissance*). This sexual encounter within one's own body continuously fertilises the mind, begetting otherness in sudden circuits of interaction. These male and female powers create several non-binary possibilities as they proliferate difference from this sexual activity in the "mind", the androgynous stage for multitudes of affirmative fictions. Some of Woolf's critics have seen the androgynous argument as an attenuation of a feminine defence and, thus, as a way to jettison a strong feminist stance[21]. However, as we have discussed, advocating for both the feminine and the masculine to find common ground in ourselves is indeed a very political

[21]See "The Authority of Anger: Three Guineas as a case study" (1991), by Brenda R. Silver.

and feminist stance, since it is in this common ground that the patriarchal system of cooptation and annihilation of a projected stranger, an other to myself, can be put to an end[22].

Thus, throughout these three chapters, we have been working towards the inconclusive conclusion that fiction is a site of creation of possibilities which will emerge as the real world changes. It is indeed possible to affirm so because fiction, as Woolf and Cixous devise it, can twist the engines of our current languages, these languages that are still functioning according to the patriarchal mechanisms that form and inform discourses and performances, and, consequently, dictate the primacy of one, single, masculine subjectivity. In this sense, it is *écriture féminine* that will bring the binary performances of the phallocentric performing theatre to a halt. And when the rock upon which this stage is founded crumbles, we will finally be able to watch a different scene unfold: androgynous poets with their pens in hand, after having challenged years of patriarchal tradition, will have continued to give voice to the poets who could have been, the Judith Shakespeares of the world.

[22]Which disarticulates the scapegoat mechanism that informs our idea of the subjective and the collective, as Christine Froula demonstrates as she analyses Woolf and Renée Girard (1994).

CURTAIN

The curtain draws upon our androgynous poets, as they write silently on the empty stage. Now that we have unveiled before our audience's eyes the meanderings of their writing, their drives, their mission of giving voice to the living dead, it is time to come to a close. But even if our revels now are ended, the "transitory splendours" of modernism, the "famous marriages" of feminine writing, the ghosts we have been chasing throughout these pages so far, they all keep echoing in an endless trace of words and meanings, calling for investigation, daring our curiosity, and our instinctive movement is to follow this track even further.

So, following the irresistible trace of *écriture feminine*, with its repetitions, its digressions, its winding sentences, which make us plunge into the dark unconscious only to emerge enlightened (or endarkened) and newly born, this research shall take a plunge, once more. We have said that Cixous is a prolific thinker, a boundless writer; indeed, she was shown here as an immense philosopher. The next natural step would be, then, to delve deep into her fiction. Cixous, the fictionist, and Cixous, the playwright, will emerge in the future, as this research goes on. As for Virginia Woolf, we hope that, within these pages, we have made clear that her work is vast and inexhaustible. Thus, in the future research we shall unfold the words of her fiction, as well as look back at the texts explored here, in search of new meanings, on the androgynous poet's trail, trying to catch the ungraspable.

But silence, now. The poet is writing. The only sound we can hear is pen gliding over paper behind the closed curtains.

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