



Universiteit Utrecht

Faculty of Arts

Department of Gender Studies

Muntstraat 2A

3512 EV Utrecht

+31 (0) 30 253 6154

Playing the Instrument

Writing, Body and Mind
in Virginia Woolf's Non-Fiction

Lenneke de Ruijter, 3341607

Supervisor: dr. Babs Boter

Second reader: dr. Eva Midden

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"The words we seek hang close to the tree.
We come at dawn and find them sweet
beneath the leaf."

-Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*

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Introduction

The idea for this thesis started when I attended Joanna Bourke's inaugural address held on June 8, 2011 at Utrecht University. Currently, Joanne Bourke is Professor of History at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on the different facets of violence and inhumanity that mark the progress of human civilization. Bourke's theory during her inaugural address was concerned with the relationality of pain and sympathy in narration via the use of metaphors. She focuses on embodiment in general and specifically on the split between mind and body in illness and pain. Bourke's theory on metaphor creation and embodiment is what caught my interest.

The question that arises in Bourke's work is to what extent the mind that creates metaphors is embodied; whether it is shaped with and by the body. She argues that consciousness and mind are inherently embodied: "the body is not just something we own, it is something we are" (Bourke 14). Nevertheless, the conscious intertwining of the body and cognitive processes, such as the mind, does not imply that this takes place exclusively 'within' something called 'the individual' (Bourke 16). The body that creates language and metaphor is a social entity. Metaphor creation is a social and embodied phenomenon; the context (environmental, relational, historical, material) matters during the whole process (Bourke 17). The fact that Bourke analyses work by Virginia Woolf is part of the reason why her theory interested me. Virginia Woolf and her work have been my personal favourites for years, especially as academic research subjects.

In short, I became interested in the concept of embodiment and especially the application and characteristics of embodiment in the writings of a literary author such as Woolf. Therefore, I decided to elaborate on this subject in my master's thesis. Another aspect had to be taken into account when defining my research subject, because a master's thesis is ideally linked to the internship of the student. Part of my internship at NOG (Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies) was to organize the NOISE summer school 2012. The subject of this year's summer school is: "Stillness and

Movement of Images: New Perspectives on Temporality, Technology and the Senses in Feminist Theory". At the summer school, there will be a focus on the interplay between images, sounds, environments, affects and embodiment. The coordinators, dr. Bettina Papenburg and dr. Marta Zarzycka, will explore the research fields of e.g. film, photography, art, medicine, biotechnology, neurology and music. During the summer school, the aspects of images, sounds, environments, etc. will be positioned in an interdisciplinary and intersectional perspective and focus particularly on issues of gender, race, ethnicity, class and (dis)ability, as this is inherent to Gender Studies research. From the NOISE summer school's subject, I adopted the aspect of embodiment and combined it with the theory of Joanna Bourke. My research-focus is not on image culture, but on literature because my academic background is in Literary Studies.

This research will concentrate on the theories of body/mind split that Virginia Woolf explicates in her non-fictional work. These theories are not necessarily about Woolf's personal life, but she applies them in a more general argument unto other artists and authors. I have chosen for her non-fictional work because I want to address the theories in which Woolf is the explicit narrator. If I would have used fiction, the thesis would also have to have a focus on e.g. the narrator, the implied reader and the implied author. Nancy Walker, professor of English and former director of the Gender Studies program at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, wrote about the importance of applying these literary concepts in autobiographical work (Walker 272). She states that letters and diaries are more accessible to uninformed readers because they do not have to be censored and are therefore devoid of literary constructions such as an implied author. This autobiographical work is not meant to be read by a large audience, but to be read by the people they are addressed to. Walker claims that this is visible in the style of the writing:

Such forms as letters, journals, and diaries are at once more private and more accessible than poetry or fiction that is intended for direct exposure to the eyes of strangers. The distance between writer and reader afforded by the artifices of poetry and fiction – devices such as metaphoric and symbolic structures – is nominally absent, and the writer translates thought into direct dialogue with self or specific others (273).

Walker's claims in the previous quote affirm my hypothesis that general literary tactics do not apply to autobiographical work. On the other hand, I would counteract Walker in her assertion that metaphor use and symbolic structures are absent from all non-fictional writing. Woolf herself, being a literary author, writes voluble and wordy, in her

autobiographical work as much as in her fiction. Towards the end of this research, it will become clear to the reader that Woolf's autobiographical writings work on as many different levels as her fiction does.

Nancy Walker will be quoted extensively in this research in an affirmative manner. Though, in contrast to the former claim of Walker that ego-documents are always private, Woolf wrote in her diaries about a possible audience and her role as a narrator. The entries that will be analysed were written in the period between 1926 and 1928. This was a period in which Woolf reflects on her state of mind, her consciousness and her way of writing (Briggs 127). This can be seen in her writing of the essays "On Being Ill" (1926), "Memories and Notes" (1928) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). These essays deal with, respectively, illness and its consequences for persons in society, the working of the human mind on the topic of memories, and the position of female writers of fiction. I will start with a quote from Virginia Woolf's diary. The quote itself is about Woolf's intended reader when she is writing in her diary:

And this shall be written for my own pleasure, -- But that phrase inhibits me: for if one writes only for one's own pleasure, - I dont [sic] know what it is that happens. I suppose the convention of writing is destroyed; therefore one does not write at all (Woolf 201).

In this quote, Woolf claims that a person can never write solely for him/herself. This cannot be done because, to Woolf, it is inherent in the act of writing that it is intended to a specific audience. The 'convention of writing' demands in itself an audience or an assumed reader. Nancy Walker, in her article "Wider than the Sky" (1988), goes as far as claiming that to Woolf all writing is a form of communication with another person or with other people (277). Even in her diaries, which one can assume are primarily written for herself, Woolf was conscious of a reader; someone reading along over her shoulder when she was writing. This can be read in her diary entry of March 20, 1926:

But what is to become of these diaries, I asked myself yesterday. If I died, what would Leo [Leonard] make of them? He would be disinclined to burn them; he could not publish them. Well, he should make up a book from them, I think; and then burn the body. I dare-say there is a little book in them: if the scraps and scratches were straightened out a little (3:67).

Here one can read that Woolf was already planning the destiny of her diaries. In this entry

it seems as if Woolf encourages her husband Leonard Woolf to publish the diaries after her death. Of course, Woolf thought in this manner of her writings because, by then, she was a well-known literary figure and she knew her diaries would be read widely when published. This makes her an entirely different diary writer from the common 15-year-old girl who never thinks of being published. In short, Woolf wrote her diaries with herself as the narrator, but with the thought in mind that her diaries might get published.

Structure

The main issues for this thesis are embodiment and mind/body dualisms. In the following chapters, these concepts will be analysed by close-reading several fragments of Virginia Woolf's diaries, her letters and the essays *A Room of One's Own* and "On Being Ill". The first chapter provides a framework for this research by giving a general introduction to the use of embodiment and body/mind dualisms in this thesis. Also, I will introduce several distinguished literary scholars whose theories are of importance to this research. These theories are aimed to be used as the starting points for the analysis of Woolf's writings. The second chapter will elaborate on Woolf's relational understanding of embodiment and body/mind dualisms when she writes on mental illness and bodily pain. This angle of incidence has its foundations in the theory by Joanne Bourke on embodiment and metaphor use. In the third chapter, I will analyse the theory on embodiment and body/mind dualisms that Woolf appoints when writing about female literary creativity in the essay *A Room of One's Own* (1928). This chapter has generational aspects; in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf wrote about the 19th century female authors who preceded her and she provides future women writers with maternal advice. There is a noticeable discrepancy in the way she theorizes these two different groups. This will be analysed in relation to the concepts of embodiment and body/mind dualisms. By way of conclusion, the last chapter provides a comparison of the chapter on pain and illness and the chapter on female literary creativity. In short, I will compare these two chapters and analyse what can be concluded regarding Woolf's written theories on the relationality of embodiment and body/mind dualisms.

Chapter 1

Body/Mind Dualisms and Embodiment

This chapter will serve as a theoretical introduction to the critics and their theories that are referred to in this research. Two of the most important theorists in this thesis are Joanna Bourke and Vivian Sobchack. Both researchers are valuable for this research in their use of the terminology of embodiment and body/mind dualisms. Next to that, I will use the work written by literary critics Jane Marcus and Nancy Walker. Their theories on literature are important in addition to the more philosophical theories by Bourke and Sobchack, because they both examined and wrote about the non-fictional work of Virginia Woolf. Next to that, this thesis aims to provide the results of a literary research, in which literary critics are indispensable. With the use of introductions to these theories and short examples of analyses of Virginia Woolf's work, I will explain the use of the terminology.

"Carnal Thoughts"

Vivian Sobchack published her book *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* in 2004. It has been proven to be a groundbreaking work in the field of image cultures, and is extensively used as theoretical background in gender sensitive teaching and research methods. 'Embodiment' is one of the key terms in the work of Sobchack. According to her, embodiment in itself is too little researched in modern-day cultural analysis, because contemporary research starts with the body with too short-sighted interpretations: "the body, however privileged, has been regarded primarily as an object among other objects—most often like a text and sometimes like a machine" (3). By doing so, modern research misses the chance to take the next step to analyse the body in combination with the mind, its surroundings, history and materiality: "It thus misses the opportunity to add sentience and sensibility to our notions of self and person, and to assert an added dimension of materiality to our notions of culture and history" (3).

Therefore, according to Sobchack, the switch from the body as an empirical or analytical subject to embodiment as the basis of culture and self is needed (4). Embodiment is when a person makes sense of the self and of others by a combination of the knowledge of the material body and consciousness/the mind:

Embodiment is a radically material condition of human being that necessarily entails both the body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an *irreducible ensemble*. Thus we matter and we mean through processes and logics of sense-making that owe as much to our carnal existence as they do to our conscious thought [her emphasis] (4).

Ideally, embodiment takes place when the material body and its surroundings, culture, history, race, age, etc. work together with the mind/consciousness in giving meaning to self, others and its surroundings. Here a link can be seen between Joanne Bourke's theory and these claims by Sobchack. Like in Sobchack's theory, Bourke claims that embodiment is the ground where the cultural and historical links of the carnal, touchable, material body and the mind/consciousness meet. Next to that, Bourke's theory is also connected to the creation of metaphors, and indicates to what extent the material body influences the creation and use of metaphors. One of the conclusions in her inaugural lecture is that the use of metaphors is connected to culture and history. Therefore the vocabulary about pain and illness is never transhistorical or transnational and always different (18).

Using the definitions of 'embodiment' by Vivian Sobchack and Joanne Bourke, I will specify the use of the term 'body/mind dualisms' for this thesis. When writing about body/mind dualisms, I refer specifically to the link or the lack of a link between the material and physical body and the mind/consciousness. Everything that is inherently related to it, e.g. ethnicity, gender, and its (dis)abilities belongs to this concept of the body. The mind/consciousness includes also creativity and the products of mental work, like work of literature or theories. In short, embodiment is the theory of the body and the mind intrinsically working together and relating to each other. This can also be called 'conscious' embodiment; which is when a person writes, speaks or thinks consciously from the body; and thus what is written, spoken or thought is consciously shaped by the gender, ethnicity and/or (dis)abilities of the body. When a split between the body and the mind is constituted, there is no embodiment and the body and mind function apart and do not influence each other.

As an example of how the previous theories will be utilized in relation to a non-fictional text by Virginia Woolf, the following section will provide a short analysis of the

next quote from a diary entry by Woolf written on 15 September 1926:

Oh its [sic] beginning its [sic] coming – the horror – physically like a painful wave swelling about the breast ... God, I wish I were dead. Pause. But why am I feeling this? Let me watch the wave rise. I watch. Vanessa. Children. Failure. Yes; I detect that (110).

In this entry, Woolf wants to practice with her stream-of-consciousness writing. Stream-of-consciousness is a technique of narration in fiction which in essence tries to convey what spontaneously comes to the mind of the author. In this specific diary entry, Woolf writes about a depression which comes rushing unto her. The depression is part of the mind in the mind/body dualism; it is one of her mental illnesses. Nevertheless, what can be read in: “physically like a painful wave swelling about the breast” (110), is that her body is involved in the illness as well. Her physical body is apparently an intrinsic part of her mental illness. Woolf does not separate the body and mind; her mental illness shapes her physical health or the lack thereof and her body influences her mental illness. This fragment illustrates how Woolf writes about embodiment. Towards the end of the following chapter, I will provide more applications and characteristics of this form of embodiment employed by Woolf in her autobiographical writing.

Literary Minds

Nancy Walker is a literary critic with a speciality in English literature. She has a history in publishing in the field of Gender Studies with e.g. *Shaping our Mothers' World: American Women's Magazines*, in which she rethinks the stereotypes of the middle-class ideal of American Women in the 1940s. The article by Walker used here is published in the book *The Private Self* edited by Shari Benstock. The essay by Walker is called “Wider than the Sky: Public Presence and Private Self in Dickinson, James, and Woolf” and deals with the autobiographical work of Emily Dickinson, Alice James and Virginia Woolf. Next to Walker's writing about the autobiographical aspects of Woolf's work, as has been touched upon in the introduction, she has theories on the importance of illness in the life of Woolf. Walker writes on the possibility that illness for Woolf is connected to physical solitude or enforced solitude (290). Walker concludes by stating that the fact that people in general are obliged to take a rest when they are ill, created possibilities for Woolf, who needed the solitude to work on her creative processes. As will become clear towards the end of the third chapter, Walker's theory compliments the hypothesis in this research that the relation between illness, embodiment and mind/body dualisms created possibilities for Woolf as an artist.

Jane Marcus is, like Nancy Walker, a literary critic in English literature and Gender Studies. Her work *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf* (1981) and her book *Virginia Woolf and the Language of Patriarchy* (1987) function both as a background to this research. Marcus will be mentioned as another starting point of how the relationality of embodiment and the body/mind dualisms work in this research. In *Virginia Woolf and the Language of Patriarchy*, Marcus argues that Woolf is the first modern socialist feminist critic (3). Around this statement most of the essays in the book are centered. Important for this research, however, is the essay in which Marcus presents a new interpretation of *A Room of One's Own*. Marcus' essay also takes up *A Room of One's Own*, and applies the concept of embodiment. Marcus studies the Stephen family, which is Virginia Woolf's maiden name, and states that Woolf "transforms the inherited languages of law, history, political reform and official biography into a feminist, socialist and pacifist critique of patriarchy" (16). Including heritage into contemporary interpretations and viewpoints on feminism, socialism and pacifism is also a form of conscious embodiment. This can namely be accomplished by acknowledging the bodily and physical standpoint and personal heritage, and incorporating these into (literary) products of the artist's mind.

As is mentioned above, Walker and Marcus have both written extensively on the relational understanding of embodiment and body/mind dualisms in the work by Woolf. I will rethink and reconnect these concepts in relation to illness and creativity. First, by way of illustration, I will analyze a fragment of Marcus' understanding of how Woolf wrote about body/mind dualisms. The following quote is part of an argument that Marcus bases on diary entries by Woolf writing about her relationship with her husband Leonard Woolf. Marcus recognizes a clear distinction between body and mind in Woolf's writing:

The person who mothered Virginia Woolf's body, ordered her daily life, and watched over her illnesses, was not eligible for the post of mothering her mind. Leonard was neither inspiration nor ideal audience for her work. If she was a musical instrument, he was a meticulous and expert craftsman, keeping it in order, replacing strings, polishing wood, keeping it out of the damp and the draughts, applying rosin to the bow. But Leonard did not play the instrument (Marcus 106).

This quote can be read as if Leonard Woolf was good enough to nurse Virginia's body, but when it came to her writing he did not meet the required standards. Apparently, Woolf made a clear distinction between her bodily affairs and her mind, creativity and literary work. Woolf needed inspiration and an audience in order to create for her creative mind. This is noticed by Marcus in her analysis of the non-fictional work by Woolf. The

relationality between body/mind dualisms and creativity will be further analyzed by close-reading Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*.

Chapter 2

Mental Illness and Bodily Pain

This chapter will focus on the relational understanding of embodiment, body/mind dualisms and Virginia Woolf's writings on mental illness and bodily pain. Unlike Joanne Bourke has done in her research, this analysis will not centre on the change of Virginia Woolf's use of metaphors over time or to what extent they differ from one genre to the next. Instead, I will examine what applications and characteristics of embodiment and body/mind dualisms can be found in Woolf's writings on illness and pain. As a literary writer, Woolf was a frequent user of quotes, metaphors, and implicit references to authors, transcendentalists, philosophers, etc. Woolf definitely had "the mind of the artist" (Woolf 320) as she stated herself in her essay "On Being Ill". In order to do a consistent research out of the web of metaphors and references Woolf uses in her work, I chose to concentrate on the instances in which Woolf writes about illness. By using several quotes from Woolf's non-fiction I will argue that, according to Woolf's writing, the mind and body are not able to split from each other. Woolf argues it is preferable not to have a split between the body and the mind; bodily illness can be of use to creative artists. Bourke, Jane Marcus, and Nancy Walker have all written on the interplay between body/mind dualisms and pain/illness in Woolf's work. Nevertheless, these scholars and critics have never tried to rethink these concepts by comparing them to another theme in Woolf's writing. I will rethink the concepts of embodiment and body/mind split by comparing the themes of illness and creativity.

A Gendered Issue

The focus of this research on illness is an aspect which, in Virginia Woolf's case, has several layers because Woolf has dealt with a lot of several mental illnesses which frequently resulted in physical pain. In the perspective of this analysis a certain kind of

body/mind dualism is intrinsic; mental illnesses and bodily pain are inherently a link between the body and the mind. Woolf's illnesses started in 1895 when she was 13, right after the death of her mother. That was when she had her first nervous breakdown. In 1904, Virginia Woolf's father died, which was the moment she had her second nervous breakdown. Her third breakdown was in 1913, when she had completed her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (Briggs 172). Nervous breakdowns and hysteria were gendered terms in the 19th and 20th century. Michel Foucault claims in his *History of Sexuality* (1976) that in the beginning of the 19th century nervous disorders were connected with sexual perverseness, irregularity and frustration (30). Especially the irregularity of life is what doctor's thought to be the cause of Virginia Woolf's problems. However, in the 19th century women were seen as more liable to mental illnesses in any case.

Hysterization of the female body began around the beginning of the 18th century. The definition of hysteria according to the Oxford English Dictionary is "[a] functional disturbance of the nervous system, characterized by such disorders as e.g. anæsthesia, hyperæsthesia, convulsions and usually attended with emotional disturbances and enfeeblement or perversion of the moral and intellectual faculties" ("Hysteria" par. 1). A little footnote which is included in this definition by the Oxford English Dictionary is curious: "Women being much more liable than men to this disorder, it was originally thought to be due to a disturbance of the uterus and its functions" ("Hysteria" par. 1). This includes the assumption that women are more prone to hysteria than men, which is not suitable for a dictionary considering a dictionary ought to be objective, but it sketches exactly the right picture of the connotations which were originally connected to hysteria and mental illnesses. This is to illustrate the discourse in which Woolf was taught to think and write about mental illnesses. On top of that, mental illness was a frequent phenomenon in the Woolf family. Her cousin James Stephen was thought to suffer from bipolar disorder, and committed suicide when he was 33 years old. Taking this into account, it is not surprising that Virginia Woolf was familiar with the theme of mental illness and wrote extensively on the subject in her fiction as well as her autobiographical work.

Like the Pod of a Pea

The following section will focus on a fragment of the essay "On Being Ill", written by Virginia Woolf in 1926. As the title suggests, the essay does not deal with illness in itself but more with the patients. Woolf concentrates on, amongst others, the position of a person within society when he or she falls ill and with the question how a patient is able to talk about his or her disease without discomfoting other people. In short, Woolf aims to

explain how patients are positioned in society in comparison to healthy people. They might, for example, have privileges that healthy people do not have or the other way around. In the specific quote of this section, Woolf discusses her views on the division between the body and the mind, especially when the person is ill or in pain:

All day, all night the body intervenes; blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours, turns to wax in the warmth of June, hardens to tallow in the murk of February. The creature within can only gaze through the pane – smudged or rosy; it cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant; it must go through the whole unending procession of changes, heat and cold, comfort and discomfort, hunger and satisfaction, health and illness, until there comes the inevitable catastrophe; the body smashes itself to smithereens, and the soul (it is said) escapes. [...] The great wars which it [the body] wages by itself, with the mind a slave to it, in the solitude of the bedroom against the assault of fever or the oncome of melancholia, are neglected. Nor is the reason far to seek. To look these things squarely in the face would need the courage of a lion tamer; a robust philosophy; a reason rooted in the bowels of the earth. Short of these, this monster, the body, this miracle, its pain, will soon make us taper into mysticism, or rise, with rapid beats of the wings, into raptures of transcendentalism (318).

In this fragment, Woolf writes about the relationality between the body and the mind at several instances. The first example is: "All day, all night the body intervenes" (318). This sentence shows that, according to Woolf, the mind/consciousness is constantly oppressed by the body. The mind/consciousness is not able to free itself from the body, because when the body is ill it has a way to keep begging for attention. Another example of this inextricable way of writing about the body and the mind is the sentence: "The great wars which it [the body] wages by itself, with the mind a slave to it..." (318). Again the mind is subservient to the body. Woolf seems to suggest that the mind should be able to function on its own, but this is deemed impossible because of the boundaries of the body. Also, her use of metaphors in "[The mind] cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant" shows Woolf's relational understanding of the mind and the body. In this context, Woolf again suggests they are not able to separate and function on their own. The body and mind cannot split in the same way as the "pod" can split of the 'pea' and the 'sheath' can separate from the 'knife' (318); the body and mind are always connected and always in dialogue.

Clearly, in the context of illness, Woolf writes about the mind/body dualism as an

intrinsic entirety. In relation to the theories by Vivian Sobchack and Joanne Bourke on embodiment, these examples and their theories are equivalents. In the previous quote, Woolf claims that in illness the mind is always shaped by the body, because the mind is not able to exceed the boundaries of the body. All (dis)abilities and boundaries of the body during illness have direct influence on the working of the mind. The mind is conscious of the body and therefore of its surroundings, history, race, age, and of illnesses. I would argue that Woolf seems to write about a form of embodiment in the sense that Sobchack and Bourke do in their theory. Sobchack writes: "Embodiment is a radically material condition of human being that necessarily entails both the body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an irreducible ensemble" (4). Woolf writes in the same way about the link between body and mind: they are always working together, always in embodiment.

In the previous quote, Woolf considers the relationship between the material body and the mind to be one of constant negotiation. Her use of: "blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours, turns to wax in the warmth of June, hardens to tallow in the murk of February" (318) is an example of this constant dialogue between the body and the mind. In addition to the claim of the intrinsic link between the body and the mind in the previous paragraph, this quote shows the discrepancy between the carnal body and the mind/consciousness. The only moment, Woolf writes, the body is able to split from the mind is when a person dies: "until there comes the inevitable catastrophe; the body smashes itself to smithereens, and the soul (it is said) escapes" (318). This makes the separation from the body feel like a relief to the mind. Woolf could have thought of a solution for this difficult collaboration between mind and body. For example, she could have concluded her essay that because the mind cannot escape the body, conscious embodiment is called for. The mind should try to understand the body and its contexts in order to support a relationship between the two. On the contrary, however, Woolf does not offer a solution of any kind for the discrepancy of this body/mind dualism in this essay. In this quote she leaves it at that, and continues with another topic; the mind and the body seem to stay in a wringing relationship with each other.

Something Springs

This paragraph will focus on a fragment from an entry in Virginia Woolf's diary dated 15 September 1930. At the moment she writes this passage, Woolf herself is not suffering from one of her nervous breakdowns or other bodily illnesses (Briggs 178). Nevertheless, during that same period Woolf was completing her essay "On Being Ill", which is discussed in the previous section. Most likely, Woolf was very much preoccupied with the topic of

illness at that time, which is probably the reason why she wrote about it in her diary. This paragraph will rethink and reconnect the concepts and the argument discussed in the previous section. By close-reading the quotes used in this paragraph, I will be able to push the argument further and provide a less static perspective on Woolf's written work on illness than was provided in the previous part. In the following quote, Woolf hints at the idea that illness can be of great assistance to the creative mind:

I believe these illnesses are in my case – how shall I express it? - partly mystical. Something happens in my mind. It refuses to go on registering impressions. It shuts itself up. It becomes chrysalis. I lie quite torpid, often with acute physical pain . . . Then suddenly something springs (287).

Again in this quote, like in the previous section, the mind is preoccupied with the demeanour of the body. However, something happens in this quote that has not been encountered in the previous examples. Woolf writes: "Then suddenly something springs". Apparently the illness stirs something in her mind. In that same diary entry of 19 September 1930, Woolf describes how her creative mind needs rest and tranquillity in order to bloom. She writes that her "mind works in idleness. To do nothing is often my most profitable way" (287). When her mind shows the symptoms of illness, when it "shuts itself up" and "refuses to go on registering impressions" (287), she is able to obtain the rest that her mind needs, and arrive at the stage at which her mind works most productively. Mental illness for Woolf is an excuse to be permitted to retreat from society because it is commonly known that people who are ill need rest. Nobody frowned upon a patient who withdrew from society in order to recover from an illness. Thus, what can be read in "Then suddenly something springs" is the creativity that 'springs' from the mind when it is not preoccupied with surroundings. Nancy Walker addresses this specific topic in her essay "Wider than the Sky" in Shari Benstock's *The Private Self* (1988). She states: "Illness was, for Woolf, a form of enforced solitude" (293). When Woolf's mind was too much troubled by surroundings and it did not have the opportunity to receive some rest, it drew away from her, shut itself up and forced her to solitude. These mental illnesses which made her creativity spring authorized Woolf to step temporarily out of society.

Jane Marcus also writes about the possibilities which Woolf describes that illness can have for a person. Because the mind and body are inextricably connected during illness, the patient is forced to take the trip into his or her own interior:

The writer, Virginia thought, takes a passive role. Romantically, she is an instrument waiting to be played ... And this condition demands collaboration, the wind, the world, another person. Its analogue, of course, is illness. In "On Being Ill," Virginia Woolf describes the "astonishing" spiritual change she experiences, "the undiscovered countries" disclosed "when the lights of health go down." Illness is a "voyage in" for the artist, a trip into those silent catacombs where the self withdraws and takes the veil (109).

This "voyage in for the artist, a trip into those silent catacombs where the self withdraws and takes the veil" is the journey where, according to Woolf, artists will be able to collect the necessary inspiration. In short, Woolf claims creativity is the by-product of the enforced solitude which accompanies mental illness.

In conclusion, according to Woolf, it is impossible to split the mind from the body during illness. When describing body/mind dualisms in her essay "On Being Ill", she uses metaphors of objects that are not able to split from each other. Woolf argues that the body constantly attracts the attention of the mind/consciousness because of its boundaries during periods of illness. When taking the definition of 'embodiment' from Vivian Sobchack and Joanne Bourke's work into account, these fragments of Woolf's autobiographical work suggest that embodiment is inherent when a person is ill. This does not mean that this relationship is unobstructed. The creative mind of the artist needs to have the freedom to create and have inspiration. Unexpectedly, this possibility is created through the same illness. When the artist is able to draw back from society in order to have the rest and solitude to recover, her creative mind will be able to focus on itself and find the inspiration it needs.

Chapter 3

Literary Creativity

This chapter will focus on Virginia Woolf's relational understanding of female creativity and body/mind dualisms in her autobiographical work. I will link these three aspects in order to form a clear picture of how Woolf wrote about body/mind dualisms. The last chapter ended with literary creativity, which sprung from the artist's mind when he/she had taken rest in order to recover from illness. This chapter will the relationality of this creativity with body/mind dualisms and embodiment in Woolf's non-fiction. I will analyse several quotes from the essay *A Room of One's Own* (1928). This essay has been a source of inspiration for future generations of female writers, students and scholars alike. Not surprisingly so, because it was Woolf's aim to encourage next generations to publish. In her essay, which is based on a series of lectures given at the Newnham College and Girton College at Cambridge University in 1928, she was asked to speak about women and fiction, which proved to be a difficult subject for her. In the essay, she describes the process of how she came to the answer that a room of one's own and a sufficient amount of money are what a woman needs if she is to write fiction.

A Room of One's Own

First, I will introduce Virginia Woolf's theory on a sister of William Shakespeare, which is a figure of her own invention. In this theory, Woolf argues that women throughout time have not had the right to work with the creative gifts that they possibly had. Even if they had limited freedom to practice their skills, their work and minds became distorted and twisted by the burden of the struggle of being a female artist. The fact that these women went mad, and that the rest of them produced work which showed the marks of their private struggles, shows that, according to Woolf, these women were not able to separate the boundaries of the gendered body from the mind and its creative processes. The mind

was affected, Woolf states, by the limitations that society bound to the female body. Therefore women should not write from their gendered bodies and let their creativity be guided by their minds.

The second section of this chapter will take the preceding argument to another level. The essay *A Room of One's Own* has a generational aspect to it. Woolf explicitly encourages her contemporary female writers to split the gendered body from the mind in order to publish literary products. She encourages them to write fiction, but without taking their own body and its sex into account. In short, she encourages contemporary and future female writers to exceed the boundaries of the female sex. Next to that, Woolf praises the nineteenth-century female authors and stages them as examples for the future writers. According to Woolf, future female writers will have to look to their grandmothers for guidance in a male-dominated world. Woolf's usage of the terms 'grandmother' and 'daughters' creates the idea of a generational gap that needs to be breached. Apparently, she needs to use these familial metaphors and figures to stress the importance of a history of female writers and artists.

Shakespeare's Sister

Virginia Woolf starts her theory of the invented sister of William Shakespeare to introduce a claim on insane women of wit. Of course such a woman did never exist but in order to make her point clear it is very useful. The imaginary sister is called Judith and has the same accomplishments as her brother. Just like her brother she makes her talents known to the world. She travels to London and tries to get a job as an actress in a theater. Unfortunately, she finds out there is no place for her talent in the male-dominated world. Her talents are not taken seriously and soon she becomes pregnant with the child of the theater-owner. In the end, she kills herself because she is unable to bear the talent without making use of it and to be subjected to the fickleness of the men in the theater. This makes Woolf write in *A Room of One's Own* on female creativity:

When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, [...] then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Brontë who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to (50).

Woolf makes clear that women who do not have the freedom to express their talents, will go insane without being able to write or perform anything. In this quote, the bodily

references of “dashing her brains out on the moor” and “torture” (50) show the link between the body and the mind. These bodily references are linked to creative mind which does not get the freedom to practice its talents.

The questions arise whether limited freedom affects the work of women who do write or perform, and whether these women could try to write free from the boundaries their bodies have forced upon them. Woolf claims the limitations of freedom depend on the woman herself. She compares Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë. Austen has created her own set of rules to which she has to abide rather than living up to the rules set by men. According to Woolf, Austen had been able to create a structure in which to write her fiction which is different from the male-dominated examples, although Austen's subjects are stereotypically female. Brontë, on the other hand, seems to struggle with the role she is assigned for being a woman and wants to be an author equal to male authors. Woolf writes about Brontë:

Her books will be deformed and twisted. She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she would 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? (70).

According to Woolf, Brontë will not be able to make full use of her talent because she lives in a constant struggle with her male oppressors and will experience physiological problems from it. In the previous quote, Woolf uses metaphors to describe these problems which refer to the body. Brontë was at “war” with her lot, which is an affair in which the body is put upfront and it might “die” (70), which is something only the body is able to do. Also, “deformed” and “cramped” (70) are bodily references. The unhappy body which is misshapen and which muscles are contracted under the oppression of the boundaries of the gendered body. This struggle is a result of the oppression of being a female writer trying to be a male writer. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf provides a solution for these women who are looking for a way to write and exceed these problems caused by gender binaries. In the following section, I will take the argument to this next level and rethink Woolf's solution by linking them to the concepts of body/mind dualisms and embodiment by Joanne Bourke and Vivian Sobshack.

Generational Gaps

Several essays have been written about the generational gap between Virginia Woolf and the writers she mentions in her essay *A Room of One's Own*. Frances Restuccia, for

example, argues that Woolf praises the early nineteenth-century novelists for their work: "Her abundant praise throughout *A Room of One's Own* of the way women writers write as women undermines the possibility that she wishes them to give up (or even modify) their style and subject matter" (Marcus 259). Nevertheless, Woolf argues that in order to follow the example of the 19th century grandmothers in literature, the future women writers should split their body from their mind. This is the solution she provides for the problem female writers encounter in the struggle for emancipation in the literary field. She wants them to exceed the gendered bodily matters of the female and male binary and write with the mind.

The next quote is a fragment from the essay *A Room of One's Own* which illustrates how Woolf addresses her audience. Woolf writes to the new generation, which consists of her pupils, and refers back to her mothers and foremothers, the nineteenth-century novelists. The nineteenth-century novelists she sets as examples are George Eliot, Jane Austen, and Emily and Charlotte Brontë:

"You have never made a discovery of any sort of importance. You have never shaken an empire or led an army into battle. The plays of Shakespeare are not by you, and you have never introduced a barbarous race to the blessings of civilization. What is your excuse?" (110).

In this way places Woolf herself in the middle of these two generations. Astrid Henry shows, in her study *Not My Mother's Sister*, that the way of addressing the last and next generations of feminists in familial terms is a sign of generational differences: "The regularity with which writers from this period [20th century] describe feminist generational relationships in familial terms suggests that differentiating themselves from their mothers was an intentional effect of stepping onto the stage of history" (72). This was also Woolf's intention; she needed these familial terms in order to stress the importance of female legacy for artists.

The important message that Woolf tries to communicate is that contemporary and future female writers should look back through their grandmothers for encouragement and inspiration. According to her, there would have been no change for future generations of female writers without the nineteenth-century novelists (66). The nineteenth-century novelists have laid a good foundation for contemporary female writers, though it is not a very solid foundation. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf encourages the future female writers to look to their grandmothers as examples:

But whatever effect discouragement and criticism had upon their writing . . . that was unimportant compared with the other difficulty which faced them (I was still considering those early nineteenth-century novelists) when they came to set their thoughts on paper – that is that they had no tradition behind them . . . For we think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to the great men writers for help . . . [They] never helped a woman yet, though she may have learnt a few tricks of them and adapted them to her use (76).

According to Woolf, the next generation of female writers will have to keep in mind where their heritage comes from and make use of it. The future female writers will have to make use of the work of their mothers and foremothers, and try to make that even more perfect. Even though every book and every author is, in Woolf's opinion, part of a heritage which influences new books and new authors, she does not encourage future female writers to write in that fashion: "I find myself saying briefly and prosaically that it is much more important to be oneself than anything else. Do not dream of influencing other people, I would say, if I knew how to make it sound exalted. Think of things in themselves" (109). In her message to future female writers, Woolf seems to be inconsistent. She praises the literary foremothers but discourages the future woman authors to write with their future grandchildren in mind.

This discrepancy between her praise for the female literary heritage and her discouragement for women to write without trying to be an example themselves becomes even clearer when Woolf offers her ultimate solution for the female struggle for literary authenticity. The solution Woolf proposes in later chapters of *A Room of One's Own* is that women should not write as women but try to exceed the boundaries of the female body:

Even so, the very first sentence that I would write here, I said, crossing over to the writing-table and taking up the page headed Women and Fiction, is that it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman (102).

In this quote, Woolf explicitly states that women should not write from their sex. They should not write as women. It even seems true for all sexes: "[It] is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex" (102). Woolf refers to the social aspect of gender when she talks about "sex". She writes about gender as a social category which is, for example by

women, limited in social and economic status. I want to argue that Woolf's use of "sex" refers as much to the gender, linked to culture, mind, social status) as to the body (genitalia). The social category which is connected to the gender 'female' is also connected to the female body because Woolf writes about women who experience social restrictions which are inflicted upon them because of physical characteristics, namely the fact that they were born with a female body. According to Woolf, the solution is that authors try to be more ambiguous: "[One] must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (102). Never trust on the drive of their own gendered body but try to exceed it, and combine different sexes, otherwise women will lose their wit in the process, like Charlotte Brontë did.

What can be seen in the quote is a split between the mind and the body. Literary creativity which is situated in the mind should, according to Woolf, not be driven by the gendered body. Woolf writes that it is even 'fatal' to let the body guide the creative processes. Taken the concepts by Vivian Sobchack into account, Woolf claims an inherent embodiment when most women create literary products. She proposes to disentangle the body from the mind and ignore embodiment. The writings which will proceed from conscious embodiment by both men and women are destined to become deformed by their preoccupation with their body. In short, when it comes to literary creativity Woolf does not call for embodiment and a clear split between the body and the mind is noticeable. According to Woolf, creativity should rise above and exceed gendered bodily matters and combine the binary of men and women in order to become a professional author.

In conclusion, by introducing generational differences between the 19th century women writers and the future generation of female authors, Woolf argues that these grandmothers of her contemporary writing women writers are the founding mothers. Nevertheless, later on in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf argues that women should not write as women but exceed the gender binary. Otherwise it might prove to be fatal for a professional author to write from the embodied social gender. The struggles female authors go through in order to be equals to male authors distort and twist their final products. I would therefore argue that the 19th century female authors did lay a foundation for contemporary women writers, but that Woolf pleads for a split between the mind and body when future women write. She claims that writing from one's own gender, and thus from the gendered body, is fatal for the literary product (102). Therefore, women should "[think] of things in themselves" (109) and produce work which starts with gendered bodily matters but eventually exceed them. The gendered body should function as a stair for the literary creativity, because they are able to help each other as is seen in the previous chapter.

Conclusion

In order to come full circle with my analysis, the first section of this conclusion will be a comparison between the last two chapters. Afterwards, I will bring the conclusion to a higher level by stating how the outcome of the comparison of these two chapters can be explained. I will start by giving a short conclusion of the two chapters. The first is concerned with Virginia Woolf's relational understanding of the concepts body/mind dualisms and embodiment when writing on illness. The second chapter analyses how Woolf writes on body/mind dualisms and embodiment in the context of literary creativity. In order to conclude, I will compare these two chapters and make an argument on what can be claimed regarding the relationality of body/mind dualisms and embodiment in Woolf's writings. At the end, I will propose several questions that arise from this research and which could lead to further research.

Contradictory conclusions

The two analytical chapters of this research have a different outcome; the chapter on embodiment in illness shows how the body and the mind are inherently and necessarily linked, according to Woolf. Woolf describes her illness using in contrast metaphors that are able to split. In the case of illness, body and mind are shaped in relation to each other, which also makes embodiment intrinsic according to the theories by Vivian Sobchack and Joanne Bourke. The enforced solitude that comes with being ill because of the doctor's prescriptions to take rest makes Woolf's creative processes in her mind spring.

The last chapter is concerned with the essay *A Room of One's Own*. In this essay it seems that Woolf is less consistent in her writing about body/mind dualisms. On the one hand, she claims that it is important to think back through the history of female authors, because male authors will not be useful for a woman writer. The male-dominated literary world leaves no room for female writers (66). Nevertheless, later in the essay, Woolf argues that the future generation of female writers should leave behind their sex and

gender and exceed these gender binaries. She argues that "it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex" (102). In this case, the gendered body and mind should be able to split. It is preferable to not link the gendered body with the mind and produce creative work which is not shaped by bodily aspects.

When comparing these two conclusions, they seem to suggest that Woolf does not write about a coherent theory on the divide between body and mind. This contradictory conclusion can be related to the fact that illness and female literary creativity are two contexts which differ too much to compare. The following paragraph will bring this comparison to a higher level by concluding with an understanding of these contradictory chapters.

Illness in support of creativity

When comparing the analytical chapters of this research, the contexts in which the central themes of body/mind dualisms and embodiment are placed are different. The first chapter on illness is not concerned with a specific gender-related perspective in Woolf's writing. The chapter on female literary creativity, on the other hand, plays into the social constructions that are linked to persons who either have a male or female body. Although these chapters seem to have a contradictory outcome, I would like to argue that these two are able to work in line with each other.

According to Woolf's writings, the body/mind split is not necessary in the context of being ill. Instead, the body and mind are able to help each other in the sense that, when the body is ill, it creates space and rest for the mind. The rest creates the opportunity for the mind to have creativity blossom. However, in creativity, the gendered body can be an obstacle to a person. Women have not been able to fully use their creative powers in a male-dominated world. Next to having the duty to take care of children and the household, they were not given the intellectual freedom to perform their talents. For some female authors, this resulted in mental illnesses or deformed literary products. Nevertheless, it is clear that the connection between the mind and body in illness had its benefits. Illness could result in compulsory solitude which included withdrawal from society.

To conclude, the interplay between the body/mind split and embodiment in the context of illness and creativity can be fruitful and desired if the person is conscious of how to deal with them. Illness is able to support creativity, for which a strong body/mind link is needed. Subsequently, creativity is not able to blossom through the social and intellectual boundaries inflicted upon women by society on the basis of their bodies, so a body/mind link is not desired. In short, it would only be productive, if a person would be

able to be in control of these two forms of body/mind dualisms.

Discussion

The difference between the ways Virginia Woolf writes about body/mind dualisms in the different contexts opens space for several questions. For example, further research can be done on what these theories on body/mind dualisms can mean for Virginia Woolf in the way that she tries to make sense of how her own body and mind work. In this research, I have consciously not paid attention to the relation of these conclusions to what Woolf thought about herself. Illness and creativity were important aspects of Virginia Woolf's life and are therefore important research perspectives. Next to that, a more gender sensitive research could enhance these conclusions. I have focused upon gender issues in the chapter on female literary creativity, but this could also be done for the texts on illness. Thirdly, one could engage with theory of metaphors from the theory by Joanna Bourke. This would give the work a more historical perspective, because one would look into the literary history of metaphor-use by Woolf.

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