“Why did men drink wine and women water?”: Questions of Gender Differences in Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse, Orlando: A Biography, and A Room of One’s Own

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“Why did men drink wine and women water?”: Questions of Gender Differences in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse, Orlando: A Biography,* and *A Room of One’s Own*

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Introduction

When one thinks of Virginia Woolf and her work, feminism often comes to mind. Much of Woolf's work and writing has been influenced by the early twentieth-century feminist movement, and Woolf and her work have in turn had a great influence on later feminist theory (Marcus 142). However, Woolf did not always directly partake in feminist activism herself, and cannot perhaps be said to actually have been a feminist herself in that sense. Her reasoning for this was mainly that she considered the cause to be too narrow in its almost sole focus on women's rights to vote, rather than that she did not believe in the cause at all (Marcus 144). Woolf was without a doubt sympathetic to the feminist movement, and her work often engages with what would be considered to be feminist theories and concerns. A significant number of Woolf's novels are concerned with women and their rights, and engage deeply with a variety of questions concerning women and gender that were also highly relevant within the feminist movement at the time.

One such question is the question of whether men and women are inherently different, or whether they actually are much more similar naturally than was traditionally believed. In the Victorian era, the belief that men and women were inherently different was widely held in British society, and was often used to justify the restriction on women's freedom and their confinement to the house (Steinbach 166, 168). However, at the start of the twentieth century, this Victorian belief became increasingly questioned in British society. Feminists, sexologists, and even average British citizens all raised the question of whether men and women were truly as different as was traditionally believed, and Woolf's work was no exception. A significant number of her works explore questions of whether men and women are truly that different, and if they are, in what ways they are different, and what causes such differences to appear. Even simply raising this question in itself could already be said to be highly beneficial to the feminist movement, as the suggestion that men and women might not be that different in itself already questions the validity of the restrictions that are placed on women in society, and therefore makes it significantly easier to argue for the removal of these restrictions.

This thesis will conduct a detailed analysis of Woolf's exploration of questions concerning gender and gender differences in three of her works – *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), and the essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) – in order to discover whether Woolf offers any definitive answers to such questions in her work. The focus will be on questions of whether there are differences between men and women, and if there are, what these differences are, and whether these differences are natural or culturally determined. The three selected works each explore these same questions regarding the existence and nature of gender differences in great detail, but the wide variety of genres between these texts enables Woolf to approach these questions in a different way in each of these works. As a result, reading and analyzing these three works together allows for a truly extensive analysis to be conducted of the various ways in which Woolf has explored questions of gender differences.

In her three works, Woolf considers and references a variety of different theories that each attempt to answer these questions. She explores sexologist and pre-war feminist theories on gender differences, and even closely examines Victorian gender ideology as well. Woolf calls attention to both the similarities and differences between men and women, and considers the importance of both. Ultimately, her three works are shown to agree that there are, in fact, clear differences between men and women, but that these differences are, as pre-war feminists also suggested, predominantly the result of societal factors rather than biological ones, implying that, inherently, men and women are actually not so different after all.

The first chapter of this thesis presents a brief overview of the views on gender and gender differences that were increasingly prevalent in Britain around the time that Woolf's three works were written. This chapter documents how the Great War changed general perceptions of differences between men and women and led to the average British citizen starting to question whether men and women truly were that different after all. This chapter also explores the theories on gender and gender differences that were proposed by early twentieth-century feminists and sexologists, as both of these groups have likely influenced Woolf and her work.

The second chapter of this thesis focuses on analyzing *To the Lighthouse*. As a realist-modernist novel, *To the Lighthouse* aims to accurately reflect views on gender as they were present among British citizens both before and after the war. This naturally leads to a heavy presence of Victorian gender ideology in the novel, as Victorian ideals, such as the belief that men and women were inherently vastly different, were still prevalent among British citizens at the time. As a result, the novel initially appears to reinforce Victorian gender ideology. However, when analyzing the novel more closely, it becomes clear that *To the Lighthouse* does not present this ideology uncritically, but in fact strongly questions and ultimately rejects this ideology. Ultimately, *To the Lighthouse* suggests that men and women are inherently not that different, but behave differently because of the expectations that are placed upon them by twentieth-century British society.

The third chapter of this thesis explores the ideas on gender and gender differences that can be found in *Orlando: A Biography*. Unlike *To the Lighthouse*, the fantastical *Orlando* is not restricted to using realistic scenarios in its exploration of theories of gender, allowing for a significantly more experimental approach to questions of gender and gender differences. The novel creates a fictive scenario in which a man, Orlando, becomes a woman, and uses this scenario to explore whether it is the change in anatomy that makes Orlando more womanly, or whether this change in Orlando is actually the result of societal factors. Through Orlando's journey of gaining a female body and learning how to navigate the world as a woman, *Orlando* suggests that any differences in abilities, traits, and behaviors between men and women are in fact the result of society rather than anatomy. The novel also explores some sexologist theories on gender, but ultimately never outright supports nor rejects these theories.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis focuses on the essay *A Room of One's Own* and its exploration of the ways in which, throughout history, society has created differences between men and women when it comes to writing. The essay argues that women are equally gifted at writing as men, but are unable to become equally great writers because of a variety of societal circumstances that hold them back. Throughout history, society has denied women access to the proper education and experiences they need to become fully realized authors. At the same time, the widespread belief that women cannot write has both angered and discouraged women, which has affected the quality of their writing and indirectly created a reality in which women indeed cannot write as well as men. *A Room of One's Own,* then, also suggests that societal factors are ultimately what create differences between men and women.

Chapter 1: Historical Context

Before examining the ways in which Woolf's three works – *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando,* and *A Room of One's Own* – explore views on gender differences, it is useful to first establish what views on gender and gender differences were held around the time they were written. The period during and after the First World War was a turbulent period in which British society was undergoing various significant social changes. Regular daily life for the British was suddenly radically changed in 1914-1916 as thousands of men were sent to the front to fight, leaving British society behind to function without them (*Gender, modernity* 1). The war disrupted the established order, and received notions of gender and gender roles were not excluded from this disruption (*Gender, modernity* 2). The positions of women slowly became more equal to men as they were starting to be allowed to vote and enter politics and professions (*Gender, modernity* 112) (Kent 3-4, 114). As a result, while previously women had been confined to the home, they were now gradually being accepted in what was previously deemed the 'male' sphere. Though traditional views of the two genders as complete opposites never fully disappeared, they were starting to make way for new views that questioned whether men and women were truly that different, or whether they were perhaps more similar than was previously thought.

Before exploring these new views on gender and gender differences that emerged after the war, it is useful to first briefly explain the traditional Victorian beliefs surrounding gender that were prevalent before the war. In short, Victorian ideology held that men and women were inherently different and each had their own unique qualities that they would be able to put into practice in their own unique spheres (Steinbach 166-168). Men were said to belong to the public sphere, where they participated in politics, business, and work, while women were said to belong to the private sphere, at home, where they cared for their children, families, and husbands (Steinbach 166). These differences between men and women were believed to have a biological basis: that is, it was believed men and women were naturally born different, and that their different traits and qualities were linked to their biological differences (Steinbach 168).

The belief that there were specific traits and skills that were linked to each gender was one that remained prevalent long after the Victorian era had ended. Even the sexologist Edward Carpenter, who was well known for rejecting Victorian views of men and women as completely and distinctly different groups of individuals, still implied that being "active, brave, originative, somewhat decisive, not too emotional; fond of out-door life, of games and sports, of science, politics, or even business; good at organization, and well-pleased with positions of responsibility" (36) was ultimately a masculine quality, while being "emotionally … complex, tender, sensitive, pitiful and loving" (33), with a strong intuition and a lesser capacity for logical thinking was more of a feminine quality, though each of these individual traits could appear in an individual of the opposite sex as well (33). Even among those who rejected Victorian views, the idea that specific 'male' and 'female' traits existed was a common view that remained prevalent in society both before and after the Great War.

The Great War was an important catalyst for some of the radical changes regarding the views and positions of the two genders that took place from 1918 onwards. When the Great War broke out in August 1914, thousands of men were forced to leave their jobs, families, and lives behind as they were sent to mainland Europe to fight (*Gender, modernity* 1). With a great number of jobs now vacant, and much work left to be done, women ended up taking over much of the work that was previously done by men. They took up jobs in factories and offices, among other places, to compensate for the loss of men in the public sphere (*Gender, modernity* 1). At the same time, "nursing service, … semimilitary relief organizations, and other wartime activities" (Kent 14) were created specifically for women, allowing them to help with the war in any way they could (Kent 14). The war granted women opportunities to join the public sphere and thereby demonstrated not only that it was possible for women to break out of their own, often restrictive private sphere and join the working life, but also that women were much more capable of working and doing men's jobs than was previously thought (*Gender, modernity* 1). Even though a great number of women lost their jobs after the war to make way for the men who were by then returning, a general sentiment arose in British society that women had proven that they were capable workers and that they should continue to seek out jobs and other similar opportunities (*Gender, modernity* 58, 61-63). The massive group of women joining the workforce during the war had a lasting impact on the views and positions of women after the war, even if not all of them continued to work after the war had ended.

The positions of women changed radically after the war, as is evident from the various rights they gained at that time. In 1918, women over 30 were granted the right to vote (*Gender, modernity* 112) (Kent 3-4), marking the start of an official acceptance of women in the public sphere. Not long after this, in November 1918, the Eligibility of Women Act was passed, allowing women to be able to put themselves up for election as well, and in 1919, the Sex Disqualification Removal Act allowed women to enter professions, assume public positions, and participate in juries (Kent 114) (Takayanagi 564). Though women were still far from being in an equal position to men, these new rights that they gained offered them a wide range of new opportunities, and allowed them to become increasingly more independent (*Gender, modernity* 49-50).

With all these changes occurring that resulted in women being put in a more equal position to men, the feeling arose among some British citizens that the strict lines that used to separate and distinguish the two genders were slowly starting to blur (Kent 99, 110) (*Gender, modernity* 82). The doctrine of separate spheres that had been so prevalent in the Victorian era was increasingly being doubted and scrutinized as women were successfully entering and being accepted into the public, 'male' sphere (*Gender, modernity* 2, 143). Where medical professionals in the Victorian era had been convinced that women were physically weak and frail, women’s efforts and intensive labor to help out during the war proved the opposite, making it hard to continue to believe in the old doctrines (*Gender, modernity* 70). It became increasingly clear that women were equally capable of having and displaying various traits and skills that previously had been seen as purely ‘masculine.’ At the end of the war, it was clear that previously held beliefs on the abilities of women had to be reexamined (*Gender, modernity* 70). The physical differences between men and women turned out not to be as immense as Victorian beliefs suggested (*Gender, modernity* 71), and the separate spheres were no longer as exclusive to their own associated gender as they used to be (*Gender, modernity* 143), which led a great number of men and women to develop new beliefs on gender that were radically different from those beliefs that were widely present in the Victorian era (Kent 5). Among some, the feeling emerged that perhaps men and women were not so different after all.

This feeling that men and women were more similar than was previously believed was especially strong among women who had spent time at the front along with men. Those who had nursed men who were seriously injured, and had lived, for a time, near the battlefields, had experienced similar horrors to those men who actually fought in the war. According to Susan Kent, “[w]omen’s sharing the horrors and experiences of men tended to efface the differences demarcating the sexes so vividly at home” (63). They felt a connection with these men “that overrode all distinctions of gender” (Kent 63). However, not only did they themselves go through experiences that were just as horrible as those of the male soldiers, they also witnessed these men behaving in ways that were previously thought to be strictly feminine. These women encountered men at their most vulnerable, and often witnessed them cry at the horrors they went through, or beg for salvation (Kent 66-67). Whereas back in Britain ideas of men as violent, strong, and heroic warriors were still prevalent, women at the front often developed completely different views of men and masculinity, and the way they saw and treated them was more similar to the way one would have treated women or children than to the way one would have treated men (Kent 66).

The war challenged views on masculinity just as it challenged views on femininity (*Gender, modernity* 2). Where previously, honor, glory, and patriotism were seen as ideals that men should strive for, the war made a large number of men face reality and learn how impossible it was to live up to these old standards of masculinity (*Gender, modernity* 2). After coming face to face with the true horrors of war, a great number of British citizens came to reject the old beliefs that upheld war and heroism as the ultimate masculine ideals (*Gender, modernity* 192, 200-201). This rejection was reinforced by psychologists, who were starting to recognize how harmful war could be to the minds of soldiers who fought in it (*Gender, modernity* 97). This led to men who failed to live up to the old heroic standards no longer being deemed cowardly or feminine (*Gender, modernity* 198). The old heroic ideals were no longer seen as ideals every man should live up to, and men were starting to be allowed to show their emotional side without this being deemed unmanly (*Gender, modernity* 198). Overall, masculinity was not nearly questioned as much as femininity, and the positions of men did not change in the same radical way in which the positions of women changed (*Gender, modernity* 216-217). However, the acceptance of previously deemed 'feminine' traits as part of a new form of masculinity shows once again that the two genders were slowly recognized as being more similar than was previously thought.

What is interesting to point out here is that much of the perceived blurring between the genders was caused by men and women behaving in ways that did not conform to their assigned gender *roles*. Men were starting to behave in ways that were typically deemed 'feminine,' and vice versa, which then sparked questions surrounding the differences between the genders themselves. This shows how at the time, various existing beliefs on the differences between the two genders were based on gender roles and stereotypes. As soon as these roles and stereotypes were proven to not always be accurate, the differences between the genders themselves were being called into question. As a result, the question of what, then, actually was the difference between men and women, if there even was any, started to emerge.

Despite the newly emerging suggestion that the genders were perhaps more similar than was previously thought, traditional Victorian views of the two genders as distinctly different had far from disappeared. Even though women were now accepted into the public sphere to cast or receive their votes, they were still assumed to have their own, unique, distinct views on politics (*Gender, modernity* 112). It was thought that women's contribution to politics would be valuable precisely *because* they would be able to offer a unique perspective that radically differed from those of men (*Gender, modernity* 112, 116, 204). Assumptions were being made about which political topics would interest women, and which topics they simply would be unable to understand, and it was even suggested that women were uninterested in the political debate because they voted based on their intuition (*Gender, modernity* 139). The belief that women were more emotional than rational, then, still lived on in British society even after women were granted the right to vote.

At the same time, the image of the woman as a traditional housewife and mother was also still prevalent among a great number of British citizens (*Gender, modernity* 7). Despite the radical changes made to the positions of women and the growing acceptance of women into the workplace and the public sphere, it was still widely assumed that they would all eventually quit their jobs, settle down, and raise a family. Domestic life was still seen as more valuable and suitable for women. The marriage bar was not overturned until 1930, meaning that before 1930, married women were not allowed to work, and working women had to quit their jobs if they got married (*Gender, modernity* 67). At the same time, considerable effort was made to improve the conditions of housewives and mothers, with the hopes that this would make domestic life more appealing for women, and thus ensure that women would eventually still choose a domestic life over a working life (*Gender, modernity* 19, 94, 98). Even though the working woman had become popular as a marker of progress and modernity, the average British woman was still believed to be(come) a domestic housewife first and foremost (*Gender, modernity* 84).

Working women were still nowhere near as valued and accepted as working men, and faced considerable obstacles in their working life that men never encountered ("Era of Domesticity" 227). For example, when men returned from the war, a great number of women were forced to give up their jobs to make way for men due to The Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act of 1919, which ordained that all returning soldiers should be given their old jobs back ("Era of Domesticity" 227) (*Gender, modernity* 62). In the end, there was still a widespread assumption that men were more deserving and more capable of working those same jobs, and thus that it was better for women to lose their jobs than for men (*Gender, modernity* 62). Ultimately, work was still much more a man's place than a woman's, while the home was still seen as a more suitable place for women than for men (*Gender, modernity* 61).

The Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act is also evidence of another development that took place after the war. As has been mentioned earlier, the war caused massive changes in British society. As a result, when the war was coming to an end, a desire arose among a great number of British men and women to re-establish order and certainty in a chaotic and changing society. This led to a rise in people wanting to re-emphasize the ways in which men and women differed from each other (Kent 99). Not only were the old doctrines of separate spheres familiar, but their neat classifications of men and women as opposites with their own associated traits were also infinitely more orderly than this new chaotic world in which masculinity and femininity could no longer easily be defined (Kent 99). According to Kent, forcing women to give up their jobs was one way to attempt to re-establish the old order, in which men worked and women stayed at home like they always had (100).

In post-war British society, then, traditional Victorian views of gender and gender differences coexisted with the new views that were emerging after the war. While in some ways men and women were still seen as distinctly different from each other, these differences were becoming increasingly blurred in other ways. Questions of whether men and women truly were that different, and if so, how they were different and for what reason became highly relevant and much debated at the time, and a clear answer to them could not yet be given.

When discussing the changes in gender relations that took place after the war, there is one movement that cannot go unmentioned: that of the feminists. A great number of the changes in the positions of women that took place from 1918 onward were made possible by the efforts of the feminist movement of the time, which strived to elevate the woman's position to one equal to the man's (Kent 114). The late nineteenth-century feminist movement started out as a reaction to the restrictive Victorian views on gender, and on women in particular. As Kent argues, "prewar British feminists regarded their movement as an attack on separate sphere ideology and its constructions of masculinity and femininity" (5). The biggest way in which pre-war feminists' beliefs on gender differed from Victorian views was in their opinion on the nature of gender differences. Where Victorian beliefs held that the differences between men and women were determined by biology, feminists, on the other hand, believed that differences between men and women were socially and culturally constructed. They believed that society's belief in rigid gender roles was what caused men and women to behave in distinctly different ways and develop different skills, as each gender was taught different values and behaviors (Kent 5). If the differences between the genders were learned, they suggested, then they could also be unlearned (Kent 5). At their core, pre-war feminists believed that men and women were inherently largely the same, capable of learning the same skills and behaviors, and therefore that, if they were treated equally in society, they would finally become equals (Kent 5). Even before the war, before questions surrounding gender differences arose among the general public, feminists had already had radically different views on gender from those that were prevalent at the time, and the influence of their views should not be underestimated.

However, after the war, and after various advancements in the positions of women had been made, the feminist movement and its core values changed. The newly emerging belief that women had now already become equal to men made the feminist movement seem redundant, despite the fact that the feminist goal of equality was still far from becoming a reality (*Gender, modernity* 49, 51, 66, 81) (Kent 116). This caused a selection of feminists to change their approach, and focus on the differences between men and women rather than the similarities (Kent 116). Their aim was to bring awareness to the fact that women had their own unique skills through which they could contribute to society, and their own unique needs that needed to be met in order for them to be able to use those skills (Kent 116). However, in focusing on the ways in which women were naturally different from men, their arguments started to resemble the old Victorian views on gender and womanhood: they argued that women had a natural affinity for motherhood and that the best work a woman could do was to raise children (Kent 117). Naturally, these new arguments were rejected by feminists who still held the same beliefs as before the war: that men and women were ultimately more similar than they were different, and that arguing otherwise would only prevent women from reaching true equality (Kent 4, 7, 117). These feminists eventually split off from the new, changed feminist movement and continued to fight for equality in the same way as they did before the war: by emphasizing similarity and equality (Kent 118, 135). Feminist views on gender differences, then, can be said to be just as varied as the general public's views on gender differences: some believed that men and women were actually surprisingly similar naturally, while others still held that men and women were in fact inherently completely different.

Feminists were not the only noteworthy and influential group of people among which new and experimental views on gender and gender differences were emerging. As the science of sexology rose in popularity in the early twentieth century (Gilbert xvii) (*Gender, modernity* 2), a great number of new theories concerning the differences between men and women were proposed among sexologists as well. Though Kent argues that sexologist theories reinforced and repeated Victorian beliefs, for example by once again suggesting that the differences between men and women were biologically determined and dependent on an individual's biological sex (110), there appears to be a general consensus among a majority of scholars that sexologists predominantly believed the opposite. Therefore, this chapter will focus primarily on newly proposed sexologist beliefs that diverged from or even outright rejected traditional Victorian ideas.

A great number of sexologists started to question whether the neatly separated categories of 'man' or 'woman' were accurate representations of the way gender actually manifested itself in individuals in everyday life. According to Sandra Gilbert, "the sexologists and their disciples began to call attention to both the fluidity and the artifice of gender" (xvii). Among a great number of sexologists, there was a growing recognition and awareness that a wide range of individuals existed who did not strictly fit into either category of 'man' or 'woman,' but rather fell somewhere in between as they possessed a mix of both 'male' and 'female' qualities (Carpenter 9) (Gilbert xviii). It was still unclear, however, what exactly caused an individual to possess qualities that were typically associated with the opposite sex, which sparked various different theories attempting to explain this phenomenon. Havelock Ellis, an important thinker in the field of sexology, argued for the existence of what he called "sexual inverts": individuals whose actual sex, or "sex of the mind" was the opposite of their biological sex (Helt 134). Similar theories were also coined to explain homosexuality, for example by the sexologist Otto Weiniger, who argued that women who loved other women must be part male in their minds, as this would explain their 'masculine' tendencies to love women (Helt 137). The already mentioned Edward Carpenter, on the other hand, took a rather more modern approach. In his book *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women,* which was published in 1908, he suggested that sometimes "intermediate" men and women were simply born who naturally possessed both 'male' and 'female' qualities (17, 37).

Carpenter also argued that the two genders were not two separate groups, but rather that they represented "the two poles of *one* group – which is the human race; so that while certainly the extreme specimens at either pole are vastly divergent, there are great numbers in the middle region who (though differing corporeally as men and women) are by emotion and temperament very near to each other" (17). Carpenter's words are evidence of a growing rejection of the belief that the genders are two rigid categories that are each other's polar opposites, and suggest a new way of thinking about gender that sees it as more of a spectrum from 'man' on one side to 'woman' on the other, with various gradations in between. This new way of thinking emphasizes the similarities between the genders rather than the differences, while also inherently including "intermediate" men and women and thereby implying that their existence is just as natural as that of any other individual.

Despite the various differences between theories such as Ellis's, Weiniger's, and Carpenter's, there is one important common ground to be found between all of them: they all suggest that it is not only possible but perhaps even natural for some men to possess 'female' qualities, and vice versa. This suggests, then, that these sexologists, like pre-war feminists, did not believe an individual's biological sex always determined their skills, traits, or behaviors. Though they did not necessarily believe that men and women were inherently largely the same, nor that the differences between the genders were the result of socialization, they did suggest that existing beliefs of the genders 'man' and 'woman' as completely opposite categories with rigid barriers separating them were wrong, and that individual members of opposite sexes could naturally be much more alike than the Victorian ideology of separate spheres suggested. In the end, most sexologists rejected the traditional Victorian ideology in favor of newly emerging beliefs.

That these sexologists' theories have influenced Woolf's work is highly likely. It would be difficult to argue that Woolf was not aware of these theories, as they were well-known and discussed in the Bloomsbury Group, a group consisting of prominent English writers and thinkers, of which Woolf was a member. Indeed, Gilbert points out that "that Carpenter's views would have been known to Woolf is more than likely, because he had met and influenced both E.M. Forster and G. Lowes Dickinson, two important figures who were closely associated with the Bloomsbury Group" (xvii). Brenda Helt confirms that the Bloomsbury Group was aware of both Ellis's theories on sexual inversion as well as Carpenter's theories on "intermediate" men and women, as she describes how the Bloomsbury group generally rejected the former in favor of the latter (137). In the interwar period, it was common for avant-garde groups like the Bloomsbury Group to openly debate the most recent developments in sexology, which would include theories such as Carpenter's and Ellis's, and as a member of this group Woolf was, therefore, no stranger to such discussions (Helt 133) (Froula 20). The Bloomsbury Group "provided a bridge from her solitary reading to the public world" (Froula 20), allowing her to participate in discussions that both informed her of existing theories as well as allowed her to form her own and contribute those to the world. Woolf, then, was not only aware of sexologist theories like Carpenter's and Ellis's, but was in fact well-informed on them, and often had her own opinions to offer on them which have likely informed the opinions on sexologist theories that are actually expressed in her work itself. Which exact opinions these are will be analyzed in great detail in the following chapters, where the various ideas on gender and gender differences that can be found in Woolf's three works, *To the Lighthouse, Orlando,* and *A Room of One's Own*, will be analyzed.

This chapter has shown that various new ways of understanding gender were emerging at the start of the twentieth century. Whereas the old Victorian doctrines dictated that men and women were distinctly different, and each had their own traits that were determined by their biological sex, these views were increasingly questioned, first by feminists and sexologists, and after the war, by the general public as well. A general sentiment emerged in British society that perhaps men and women were not actually that different after all. Among sexologists, theories were being proposed that suggested that an individual's behavior was not inherently linked to their biological sex and that a great number of men and women existed who naturally possessed both 'male' and 'female' qualities. Where previously the differences between men and women could easily have been defined using Victorian gender roles, this method was becoming increasingly unreliable, raising the question of what, then, did actually differentiate men and women, if there was even a difference at all. Pre-war feminists, for example, suggested that there might not, in fact, be much of an inherent difference between men and women, as they believed that the majority of perceived differences between men and women were actually the result of society teaching them different values and behaviors, rather than of an inherent difference between the two genders. However, these new theories on gender and gender differences were by no means unanimously accepted, and Victorian beliefs did live on among a great number of British citizens despite their being heavily questioned. Ultimately, a clear answer on what exactly early twentieth-century Britain's views on gender differences were cannot be given, as various widely different theories, both experimental and traditional, all existed alongside each other. What can be said with certainty, however, is that there was no certainty. Questions surrounding the nature of gender and gender differences were prevalent, and a great number of individuals attempted to answer such questions. One of these individuals was Virginia Woolf.

Chapter 2: *To the Lighthouse*

Published in 1927, *To the Lighthouse* is the first of Woolf's three works that will be analyzed in this thesis. Unlike the fantastical novel *Orlando* or the essay *A Room of One's Own, To the Lighthouse* is a realist-modernist novel that aims to accurately capture the daily life of twentieth-century British citizens. The novel is, therefore, less experimental or radical in its views than either of the other works, for in a way it is restricted by reflecting views on gender and gender differences as they were present among the general public, rather than exploring scientific theories that, though interesting, were of little relevance in the average citizen's lives. A large part of the story is set before the war, in a time when Victorian gender ideology was still prevalent, and as a result, traditional views on gender differences permeate the novel. This does not mean, however, that *To the Lighthouse* does not have anything new to contribute to the conversation on gender and gender differences. On the contrary, underneath the novel's seemingly traditional surface, various ideas and suggestions can be uncovered that are considerably more modern or experimental in nature. While it may appear as if *To the Lighthouse* simply captures and perhaps reinforces traditional views on the differences between men and women, it actually does much more than that: the novel analyzes and criticizes these views, raising doubt about their accuracy and suggesting that there are actually individuals, in particular women, that do not naturally adhere to Victorian gender roles. The novel also examines the impact Victorian ideology had on women, both before and after the war, by showing how these views could actually be harmful to them and prevent them from living happy and fulfilling lives. In the end, then, *To the Lighthouse* ultimately rejects Victorian gender ideology, and instead suggests that women are capable of the same or similar feats as men are, if only they are not held back by outdated, restrictive views.

The presence of traditional Victorian views on gender can primarily be found in two ways in *To the Lighthouse*: in the ways in which the characters themselves think about gender and gender roles, and in the ways in which specific characters embody these roles. Throughout the novel's first and final sections, the novel is continually written from the point of view of the characters. In these sections – most notably in the first, which is set before the war – numerous general statements about men and women can be found, showing how various characters strongly believe in a stark difference between men and women. For example, sentences such as "[w]omen can't write, women can't paint" (81), "[w]omen made civilization impossible with all their 'charm', all their silliness" (81), and "she had no control over her emotions, Andrew thought. Women hadn't" (72) appear frequently all throughout the novel, and show how a general sentiment that women were distinctly different from men by being less sensible and more emotional was clearly present in the minds of the novel's (male) characters. At the same time, generalizations about men also often appear in the characters' minds. Mrs. Ramsay, for example, comments on "the fatal sterility of the male" (35) while at the same time admiring the "admirable fabric of the masculine intelligence" (100), and also feeling protective of men "for their chivalry and valour" (5), illustrating how she believes men to embody each of these values, while also implying that these values are unique to them.

The general belief that such differences between men and women were natural is also reflected in the novel, as in the following sentence: "she talked about Jasper shooting birds, and he said, at once, soothing her instantly, that it was natural in a boy" (62). In this sentence, Mrs. Ramsay worries about her son's behavior, but her husband soothes her by saying this behavior is "natural" for men. Similarly, Mrs. Ramsay observes that her children "came to her, naturally, since she was a woman, all day long with this and that; one wanting this, another that; … often she felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions" (30). In Mrs. Ramsay's mind, being a woman is naturally linked to caring for others and their emotions. The characters in the novel, then, not only seem to believe that men and women are different, but also that these differences are natural. Through its characters, the novel here manages to reflect how general Victorian views – such as the idea that men and women were naturally and inherently different and each had their own specific associated traits – were still prevalent among pre-war British citizens.

Because each of these quotations given above is written like a factual statement, it may in some cases appear as if the traditional views they present are actually being reinforced in *To the Lighthouse*. However, it is important to realize that these statements are simply capturing thoughts as they are present in the characters' minds. By presenting these views as factual statements from their point of view, the novel shows how ingrained these beliefs were in the average individual's mind at the time, without ever actually suggesting that these beliefs are true.

Another way in which the novel only appears to reinforce traditional views on gender is through the way various characters, especially Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, are presented as embodying Victorian gender roles. Right from the moment they are introduced, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay each appear to fit their assigned gender role perfectly. Mr. Ramsay is a man of facts who prides himself on always being honest, even if this hurts his children: "What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all his own children" (4). He clearly values truth and facts over the feelings of others, and therefore immediately gives the impression that he is a man who is exceedingly more rational than emotional, which is exactly what Victorian gender roles determined men to be. Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, is at that same moment concerning herself with knitting a stocking for the son of the Lighthouse keeper, who is struggling with tuberculosis (4). The description of her husband is followed by a paragraph in which Mrs. Ramsay empathizes with people who are struggling, such as the Lighthouse keeper, and imagines how they would feel (4-5). This immediately presents Mrs. Ramsay as empathetic and emotional, especially when contrasted with her husband. A bit later, when she is with Charles Tansley, it is shown that, while Mrs. Ramsay "could not follow the ugly academic jargon" (11) that he uses while talking to her, she does seem to be able to deduce and understand exactly how he feels: "she saw now why going to the circus had knocked him off his perch, poor little man" (11). Mrs. Ramsay is introduced as being more emotional than rational or intellectual, just as women were supposed to be according to Victorian gender roles. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, then, can be said to represent the perfect, ideal Victorian married couple, as Karen Kaivola also suggests when she writes that "Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay embody the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, roles, and characters for men and women" (250), as "Mr. Ramsay is egotistical, self-absorbed, and brutally direct" (250), while "Mrs. Ramsay is giving, selfless, and willing to stretch the truth in order to spare the feelings of those she loves" (250). In presenting a couple that seems to fit Victorian gender roles perfectly, the first section of *To the Lighthouse* initially appears to suggest that these roles are in fact an accurate description of what average men and women are like.

However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that doubts surrounding the accuracy of traditional Victorian gender roles are also expressed in *To the Lighthouse,* though perhaps not always in ways that are as obvious. For example, a few chapters into the novel, the image of Mr. Ramsay that was initially introduced appears to be reinforced, as it is said that "[t]he extraordinary irrationality of her remark, the folly of women's minds enraged him" (30). Mr. Ramsay is angry that his wife "flew in the face of facts" (30), which seems to reinforce the suggestion that Mr. Ramsay is a man of facts rather than emotion. However, at the end of this paragraph, it is subtly pointed out that Mr. Ramsay's anger at this moment could also be seen as an irrational, overly emotional response: "He stamped his foot on the stone step. 'Damn you,' he said. But what had she said? Simply that it might be fine to-morrow. So it might" (30). Despite his clear dislike for irrationality, he can, in fact, also be quite irrational himself, showing that he does not perhaps adhere to Victorian gender roles as perfectly as is initially suggested.

Mrs. Ramsay's portrayal, too, implies that there is more to her than just the Victorian ideals that she seems to exemplify. Even though Mrs. Ramsay acts like the perfect Victorian housewife and mother during the day, it is pointed out that she is not able to fully or truly be herself in these moments: "it was a relief when they went to bed. For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself" (58-59). All day long she selflessly thinks about others and considers their needs and desires, but at the end of the day, she is not being herself when she does this. The novel, here, seems to suggest that even though Mrs. Ramsay may appear to be a perfect Victorian woman, this might not actually be what she is naturally like, which in turn could suggest that the Victorian idea that women naturally belonged to the private sphere is wrong. Ultimately, though it may seem as if Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay's portrayals merely reinforce traditional views on gender, they actually also do the opposite. In showing that even the seemingly perfect Victorian man and women do not fit these roles perfectly, the novel manages to subtly criticize and question Victorian gender roles – and in extension Victorian views on gender differences – and show that they can never be completely accurate.

However, where Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay do not always adhere to traditional gender roles in subtle ways, the novel contains another character who does so much more obviously: Lily Briscoe. Lily is an unmarried woman who prefers to spend her time working on her painting rather than getting involved with domestic duties. Through Lily and the various ways in which she is shown to exhibit qualities, behaviors, and natural inclinations that are either typically associated with men, or deviate from what is typically associated with women, Victorian gender ideology is severely questioned. When Mrs. Ramsay tells Lily that "an unmarried woman has missed the best of life" (47), Lily reacts to this by hoping that she will be the exception: "she would urge her own exemption from the universal law; plead for it; she liked to be alone; she liked to be herself; she was not made for that" (47). Lily is desperate not to get married and insists that "she would always go on painting, because it interested her" (68). Clearly, Lily feels more drawn to work and painting than domesticity, showing her natural inclination toward what were traditionally deemed ‘masculine’ pursuits. The phrase “she was not made for that” even outright suggests that Lily does not believe she was made for marriage, hinting at the fact that perhaps women were not all made for domesticity like Victorian gender ideology insisted they were.

The novel strongly suggests that work is more fulfilling to Lily than domesticity could ever be, implying that the Victorian belief that women naturally took to domesticity and could only be happy when raising a family was, in fact, incorrect. When the entire Ramsay family and their guests are having dinner together, Lily believes Mrs. Ramsay is wrong to pity William Bankes for not having a family of his own: “He is not in the least pitiable. He has his work” (80). This thought of Lily is soon followed by another, similar thought: “She remembered, all of a sudden as if she had found a treasure, that she too had her work” (80). Lily is shown to value work just as much, if not more, than the domesticity she might be missing out on. Work is a treasure to her, which she even views as an escape from the marriage and domesticity that she is trying to avoid: “she need not marry, thank Heaven: she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution. She would move the tree rather more to the middle” (96). The tree in this sentence refers to the tree in her painting, showing that to Lily, her work and her painting are what will save her from “that degradation” that is marriage and domesticity. Lily’s character shows that some women, like men, could get more fulfillment out of working than out of domestic life, and thus that women are in fact capable of having typically ‘masculine’ qualities. The novel here clearly rejects the Victorian belief that the two genders each have their own unique and characteristic qualities, and instead suggests that men and women are perhaps not so different after all, a suggestion which closely resembles modern views on gender that emerged after the war.

To the Lighthouse also contains thoughts and ideas that closely resemble pre-war feminist beliefs on gender. The novel contains various sections written from Lily's point of view that suggest that some differences between men and women are not, in fact, natural, but are actually the result of societal expectations that are placed upon them, which was one of the core beliefs held by pre-war feminists. During the aforementioned dinner scene, there is a moment in which Lily knows that she should be nice to Mr. Tansley because this is what is expected of women:

> There is a code of behavior she knew, whose seventh article (it may be) says that on occasions of this sort it behoves the woman, whatever her own occupation may be, to go to the help of the young man opposite so that he may expose and relieve the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity, of his urgent desire to assert himself; as indeed it is their duty, she reflected, in her old-maidenly fairness, to help us, suppose the Tube were to burst into flames. (86)

However, she wonders to herself: "how would it be … if neither of us did either of these things" (86). Ultimately, she does what is expected of her, to "be nice" (87), but by presenting Victorian gender ideology as a set of prescriptive rules and showing how Lily's first instinct is to not follow these rules, the novel suggests that these differences between men and women that Victorian ideology presents – that women help men emotionally, and men save women physically – are not, in fact, natural for men and women, but are instead taught. Lily can still act in the way she is expected to, but this does not in any way feel natural to her:

> She had done the usual trick – been nice. She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that, she thought, and the worst (if it had not been for Mr Bankes) were between men and women. Inevitably these were extremely insincere. (87)

Lily calls acting according to Victorian norms a “trick,” and deems the resulting interaction insincere, showing that, to her, behaving according to Victorian gender roles is merely an act she puts on, rather than a natural instinct. Later, in the novel’s final section, a similar moment is presented in which Lily knows what she, as a woman, is expected to do, but this action does not come naturally to her, and feels more like an act: “Surely she could imitate from recollection the glow, the rhapsody, the self-surrender she had seen on so many women’s faces” (145). The use of the word “imitate” implies that she merely copies the behavior of other women, acting out what she has been taught she is supposed to do. She finally concludes that “she could not do it” (146), showing that not only does this action not only does not come naturally to her, but in this case, she is not even capable of performing it. Behavior that the Victorians deemed typically ‘feminine,’ and natural to women, is here shown to not be natural to Lily at all. Instead, Lily has had to learn to behave like a typical Victorian woman, and sometimes still fails to do so, which suggests that the differences that Victorians claimed naturally existed between men and women were in fact taught by society, and therefore were not natural at all. Through Lily, then, *To the Lighthouse* can be said to reject Victorian beliefs on gender differences and to suggest that pre-war feminist beliefs on gender might, in fact, be closer to the truth.

Through the characters of Lily and Mrs. Ramsay, *To the Lighthouse* finally also explores and analyzes the effect that Victorian gender ideology could have on women, and ultimately suggests that this ideology might be holding both of them back in various ways, restricting the ways in which they could live their lives, and preventing them from achieving happiness and fulfillment. When it comes to Mrs. Ramsay, Thais Rutledge writes that she “is not portrayed as someone who is completely unhappy, but merely as tired – worn to death, as it were, by the patriarchy and eight children, but never with a word of complaint” (95), implying strongly that traditional views on gender and the expectations they have placed upon Mrs. Ramsay might indirectly have caused her death. The novel does indeed seem to imply that, for

Mrs. Ramsay, living up to the expectations that are placed on her comes at a cost. In a sentence already quoted earlier in this chapter, it was said that Mrs. Ramsay often "felt she was nothing but a sponge sopped full of human emotions" (30). The word "nothing" in this sentence implies that Mrs. Ramsay might feel empty inside because there appears to be no space for her own desires and feelings. As has been suggested before, Mrs. Ramsay is presented as a woman who is unable to be herself because of the constant demand that is placed upon her by Victorian ideology to be selfless and caring. The novel, then, could be said to explore the potentially harmful effect Victorian gender ideology could have on women as it shows how the expectations that were placed on them by this ideology make it difficult or near impossible for them to prioritize and care for themselves and their own needs.

The best example, however, of the novel suggesting that traditional views on gender could hold women back from achieving happiness and fulfillment can be found in the novel's third and final section. In this section, Lily finds herself struggling to finish her painting – an activity that has already been shown to be fulfilling to her earlier on in the novel – because of the expectations that have been placed upon her by others, such as Mr. Ramsay and Mr. Tansley, for being a woman. Even though this section is set after the war, at a time when Victorian gender ideology was already being increasingly questioned and rejected, this ideology is shown to still be able to have a strong effect on women at this point in history. After the war, Mr. Ramsey, for example, still holds Victorian values: "he liked men to work like that, and women to keep house" (159), and projects these values onto Lily. He expects Lily to be able to give him the sympathy his wife used to give him now that she is no longer alive because he still believes that women are naturally sympathetic. Lily, however, finds herself unable to do what is expected of her (145-146). Later, when Lily is working on her painting, she realizes that "[t]he sympathy she had not given him weighed her down. It made it difficult for her to paint" (164). Mr. Ramsay's traditional views and the expectations they place upon her, as well as her inability to meet them, are shown to prevent her from completing her painting. Similarly, the memory of Mr. Tansley's words is shown to disrupt her painting process: "Can't paint, can't write, she murmured monotonously, anxiously considering what her plan of attack should be. For the mass loomed before her; it protruded; she felt it pressing on her eyeballs" (154). The "mass" here seems to refer to the white spaces on her canvas that she has yet to paint. This quotation, then, shows that even though Lily has already made a start on her painting, she somehow finds herself overwhelmed by it when she remembers Mr. Tansley saying that women "can't paint, can't write." According to Gabrielle McIntire, this phrase "becomes one of the many refrains of the novel, echoing in Lily's mind like a haunting version of the taunt that Woolf – and women all over the world – had heard through her life" (81). Mr. Tansley's words become representative of the way traditional views on gender have always discouraged women in their pursuit of art, and the novel clearly shows how this discouragement has affected women, including Lily, over the years. However, by the end of the novel, Lily does eventually manage to finish her painting despite these obstacles, suggesting that if women are able to overcome the limitations and expectations that are placed upon them by society, they are actually capable of achieving similar feats as men, such as creating a painting.

To the Lighthouse presents an in-depth picture of how Victorian views on gender and gender differences were present in and affected the lives of everyday British citizens. The novel reflects the ways in which these Victorian views permeated the lives of British citizens, but does not simply reiterate or reinforce these views. Instead, the novel criticizes, analyzes, and rejects these views. Through characters such as Lily and Mrs. Ramsay, *To the Lighthouse* is able to suggest that the Victorian belief that the two genders were naturally different and each had their own unique qualities and traits was wrong, and that women were not necessarily naturally inclined towards domesticity. Instead, the novel shows that women could also feel a natural inclination towards typically 'masculine' pursuits, and that they might, in fact, be capable of the same skills, behaviors, and feelings as men. The novel even suggests that some differences between men and women might be the result of societal expectations rather than a natural inclination based in biology, and that these expectations, placed on women by Victorian gender ideology, might actually be harmful to women as they might prevent them from reaching happiness and fulfillment. In rejecting Victorian ideology, *To the Lighthouse* lays the groundwork for later works of Woolf, such as *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*, and allows each of these works to freely explore what the real differences between men and women might be, if the Victorian answers to questions about gender differences are not, in fact, the right ones.

Chapter 3: *Orlando: A Biography*

Woolf started working on *Orlando: A Biography* only a few months after *To the Lighthouse* was published (Gilbert xi). Despite having been written soon after each other, the two novels could perhaps not be any more different when it comes to tone and genre. Where *To the Lighthouse* is a realist-modernist novel that aims to reflect reality as accurately as possible, *Orlando* is an experimental novel that is full of fantastical elements and scenarios that could never be possible in real life. Woolf employs these to analyze and discuss essential questions about gender and gender differences in a completely new and different way. In *Orlando*, the novel's titular character changes from a man into a woman in the middle of the story, creating what is essentially a thought experiment in which the author is able to speculate upon what exactly such a change would entail. In following Orlando before, while, and after she becomes a woman, and documenting the ways in which she does and does not change, the novel is able to explore what exactly the differences are between men and women and whether these differences are the result of a biological given or of the society they live in. The novel shows that Orlando's change in sex itself does not inherently change her behavior and her perception of herself, but that, instead, the societal expectations that are placed on her because of this change in sex are what make her behave like a woman and perceive herself as one. *Orlando* also briefly explores some more experimental beliefs on gender differences, such as the theories of the sexologists Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, but the novel's final suggestion falls into line with pre-war feminist beliefs on gender, as it ultimately argues that men and women are inherently capable of the same behaviors and skills, but are taught by society to behave differently, creating perceived differences between the two genders.

What is most remarkable about Orlando's change in sex is that, initially, it does not actually change her that much. In showing how, directly after her sex changes, Orlando's life initially continues unchanged, without Orlando appearing to be affected by or even aware of the change in her body, *Orlando* suggests that anatomy, in itself, does not actually change an individual or determine how they behave and what they are capable of, nor does affect their perception of themselves and their own gender. This is even literally stated in the novel itself, as the narrator explains directly after the sex change that “Orlando had become a woman – there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity” (98). What is interesting about this mention of a change in the future is that it suggests that even though a change in anatomy *in itself* might not necessarily change Orlando herself, it will eventually still end up affecting her life, as will be explored later in this chapter. Of course, the narrator’s words cannot always be uncritically accepted as the truth, as he is shown to be somewhat unreliable later in the novel, but in this case, the novel does actually provide evidence that supports these words. In the moments directly after her physical change, there indeed does not appear to be any change in Orlando herself yet. The narrator points out that “she had woken to find herself in a position than which we can conceive none more delicate for a young lady of rank. We should not have blamed her had she rung the bell, screamed, or fainted. But Orlando showed no such signs of perturbation” (99). When she wakes up as a woman, Orlando finds herself in the middle of an insurrection, where “[t]he Turks rose against the sultan” (94-95), yet she does not react to this situation in the way the narrator believes a woman would. Similarly, when she leaves Constantinople, Orlando “rode for several days and nights and met with a variety of adventures, some at the hands of men, some at the hands of nature, in all of which Orlando acquitted herself with courage” (99). Courage is a trait that was generally associated with men, so this passage suggests that Orlando still has the same traits and abilities as she had before the change, and still behaves in typically ‘masculine’ ways. Despite having recently become a woman physically, Orlando’s behavior does not actually change, which implies that anatomy does not actually have any effect on an individual’s traits and behavior.

Another way in which *Orlando* shows that Orlando's change in sex initially does not affect or change her is through the fact that, in the time spent with the gypsies directly after her change, her life continues relatively unchanged. In fact, up until she enters English society again, she barely even seems to notice that her sex has changed: "It is a strange fact, but a true one, that up to this moment she had scarcely given her sex a thought" (108). This fact has been aptly reflected in the writing of the novel itself, as from the moment her sex changes until the moment she rejoins society, the change in her sex is not mentioned once. Instead, the novel simply continues as if no change had occurred, having the narrator describe Orlando's life and experiences in the exact same way as before, without calling any attention to her sex. The novel here implies that Orlando's change of sex has not (yet) caused any significant changes in her, because if it had, these changes would likely have been pointed out or discussed by the narrator, whose job it is, as Orlando's biographer, to chronicle any significant moments in Orlando's life. When Orlando is later reminded of her sex after re-entering English society, it is suggested that she did not consider her sex when she was with the gypsies because "the gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gipsy men" (108). This sentence not only implies that the gypsies have different perceptions of the differences between men and women than English society does – which in itself already suggests that differences between men and women are societal – but also that, because Orlando has apparently not been treated differently by the gypsies for being physical female, her sex has not been of any relevance in her life at all. *Orlando* here suggests that, as long as an individual does not come in contact with society – society being, in this case, English middle-class society – their anatomy does not affect how they live and experience their life in any significant way.

Despite the fact that Orlando is clearly said to initially not change much because of her change in anatomy, she does eventually come to understand herself as a woman once she re-enters society, and as a result, starts to behave like one. In that sense, her change in sex does indeed eventually alter her future. However, this change in Orlando is shown to be influenced by a variety of factors, and not directly caused by her change in anatomy alone. As she reflects upon her new sex and what this means for her after having re-entered society, she, at one point, does not see herself as either man or woman despite being physically female:

> And here it would seem from some ambiguity in her terms that she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither; and indeed, for the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each. (113)

Having been a man for most of her life has had a lasting effect on her identity and self-image, and that effect cannot be undone by a change in body alone, as she still "knew the secrets" of being a man. However, in having become a woman physically, and experiencing life as a woman as a result, she is also learning what it means to be a woman, and therefore knows the secrets of both. *Orlando* here implies that the experience of living as a certain gender is significantly more influential when it comes to an individual's perception of their own gender than anatomy is.

Another factor that appears to have had a great influence on Orlando's perception of herself is society's views on gender. Initially, Orlando simply dresses in "a complete outfit of such clothes as women then wore" (108) because this is what she has been taught is appropriate for an individual of her new sex to wear. Society now perceives her to be a woman, and as a result, treats her and expects her to behave as one, which she initially does without question. Brenda Helt argues that the novel "rejects the fantasy that anyone could ever truly escape the physical, and therefore the psychological, limitations of always being understood by one's culture as either male or female" (143), and this can indeed be seen in Orlando in the moments directly after re-entering English society, when she simply assumes she is a woman because that is how society sees her now. She only starts questioning her gender once she starts to realize how some of society's views about how women should behave are, in fact, not quite as natural as they initially seemed to be. It appears, then, that initially, when she re-enters society in her new body and starts living as a woman, Orlando's perception of herself changes because of the new place she inhabits in society as a result of her sex change.

However, this conclusion cannot be drawn with complete certainty. After Orlando temporarily does not see herself as either man or woman, the narrator points out that she has once again started to refer to herself as a woman: "from these opening words it is plain that something had happened during the night to give her a push towards the female sex, for she was speaking more as a woman speaks than as a man" (114). This passage suggests that what has truly caused Orlando to see herself as a woman is "something" that "had happened during the night," though what exactly this something is is not entirely clear. The novel, in the end, cannot be said to give one clear reason behind Orlando's eventual shift toward perceiving herself to be a woman. It could be due to her lived experience as a woman, society's perception of her, or a mysterious "something" that has happened during the night. However, the fact that Orlando is first shown to perceive herself to be a woman after having re-entered English society does suggest that society's perception of her gender has played a great part in this eventual change.

Once Orlando begins to live as a woman, she slowly learns what it actually means to be a woman, and comes to realize that a large number of typically female traits and behaviors do not actually come naturally to her, but have to be learned instead. The novel here uses Orlando's personal experience to show that most, if not all, of the changes between men and women that the Victorians believed to be inherent in men and women are actually learned by people of both genders as they all try to live up to the expectations that society places on them because of their sex. As she is living as a woman in a woman's body, Orlando realizes that "women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature. They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life" (110). Now that Orlando is physically a woman, she realizes that the 'womanly virtues' that women are said to possess do not come naturally as a result of their anatomy, for if they did she would have already possessed those virtues. Instead, she realizes, these qualities and behaviors are acquired through learning, and if she wants to possess these qualities as a woman – qualities that society now expects her to have – she has to work hard to be able to attain and display them. While living as a woman, Orlando starts to learn "for the first time what, in other circumstances, she would have been taught as a child, that is to say, the sacred responsibilities of womanhood" (113). This sentence once again implies that typically 'feminine' behavior and the motivations behind this behavior are not, in fact, natural, but instead determined and taught by society from a young age.

By showing how, in actively trying to conform to society's expectations, Orlando starts to behave more like a woman, the novel also manages to show how society creates differences between men and women that do not exist naturally. When Orlando feels herself becoming emotional upon seeing London again for the first time after having been away for quite some time, she cries partly because this is what is expected of her: "Do what she would to restrain them, the tears came to her eyes, until, remembering that it is becoming in a woman to weep, she let them flow" (117-118). Later, when Archduke Harry sheds a few tears in front of Orlando, the narrator explains that "[t]hat men cry as frequently and as unreasonably as women, Orlando knew from her own experience as a man; but she was beginning to be aware that women should be shocked when men display emotion in their presence, and so, shocked she was" (127). In both of these moments, Orlando's behavior is clearly shaped by the way she is expected to behave as a woman. At the same time, these two moments taken together also show that both men and women have a natural instinct to cry when emotional, but the societal expectation that men do not cry while women do causes only women to be able to let them flow freely. By trying to behave in the way they are expected to, men and women both end up reinforcing these expectations, creating a perceived difference between men and women that does not actually exist. As Stef Craps also points out, Orlando "brings to the surface many of the tacit understandings that guide the creation and maintenance of our binary gender system" (181). In showing how Orlando actively has to learn how to behave like a woman, and in doing so acts in ways that only reinforce existing beliefs about women, the novel once again calls attention to the fact that the differences between men and women are in fact predominantly created by society and the expectations society places on different individuals based on their sex, and not by their sex itself.

Another way in which society is shown to create differences between men and women in *Orlando* is through clothing. When Orlando starts wearing the clothing that she is expected to wear as a woman, she notices how these clothes, in some ways, prevent her from being able to act in ways she was able to act as a man. Though she finds that there are advantages to wearing a dress, she also realizes that dresses can be restrictive: "Could I, however, leap overboard and swim in clothes like these? No! Therefore, I should have to trust to the protection of a bluejacket" (109). *Orlando* suggests here that this difference between men and women, that women cannot swim while men can, and that women, therefore, have to rely on men to save them in emergencies, might actually be the result of the clothes men and women are expected to wear. This suggestion is reinforced when it is later pointed out that Victorian dresses were especially restrictive: "It was heavier and more drab than any dress she had yet worn. None had ever so impeded her movements. No longer could she stride through the garden with her dogs, or run lightly to the high mound and fling herself beneath the oak tree" (168). It is not her being a woman and having a female body in itself that prevents her from being able to do things she could do as a man. Instead, it is the dress society expects Orlando to wear that affects what she is capable of. Ellen Morgan writes that "Orlando is seriously thwarted as a person when she becomes a woman. Although she is still capable of doing the important things she was allowed to do as a man, she is not permitted to do them" (42). Society expects her to dress and behave according to its own perceptions of how a woman should dress and behave, and in doing so manages to influence and change her behavior, making her (behave) more like a woman.

Society and clothing, then, are shown in *Orlando* to create differences between men and women as they restrict women's behavior, making them unable of doing things that men are able to. However, when it comes to the effect of clothing on an individual, the novel also hints at a rather more experimental suggestion: that the clothing one wears might actually be what determines their gender. When the narrator describes how Orlando, shortly before the arrival of the Victorian age, regularly goes out dressed as a man and acting like one, he writes that "[s]he had, it seems, no difficulty in sustaining the different parts, for her sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive" (153). The phrasing here implies that Orlando's change from women's clothes to men's clothes and vice versa actually changes her sex or gender as well. The narrator describes how "she would more often than not become a nobleman complete from head to toe" (153), and the use of "become" in this sentence again implies that when she wears men's clothing she not only looks like a man but actually is one. In this passage, the novel basically suggests that all that differentiates Orlando the man from Orlando the woman is the type of clothes she decides to wear. As Christy Burns puts it, "[i]t is as if *she,* Orlando, might have continued to be a he, if only by virtue of dressing as a man" (351). Similarly, when the narrator is trying to make sense of what has caused Orlando to gradually become more like a woman in both thought and personality, he points out that "[t]he change of clothes had, some philosophers will say, much to do with it" (131), as clothes, according to these philosophers, "change our view of the world and the world's view of us" (131). The narrator continues on to explain that

> there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking. So, having now worn skirts for a considerable time, a certain change was visible in Orlando. (132)

Though this passage mostly talks about how clothes can change an individual’s behavior and the way they are perceived in society, it also implies that it could be possible for an individual to become a woman simply by wearing women’s clothes for a long time, and thus that clothes could change the gender of an individual. If this is true, then the only real difference between men and women would be the clothes they wear. However, since it is society that determines which clothes are associated with which gender, this difference would ultimately still be a societal one.

Though the idea that clothes could possibly determine gender does, then, clearly appear in *Orlando*, it is difficult to say with certainty that the novel truly supports this theory or argues in favor of it. It is hard to ignore the fact that, at least on page 132, the narrator carefully presents these theories as theories, which he then dismisses by proposing his own suggestions: “That is the view of some philosophers and wise ones, but on the whole, we incline to another. The difference between the sexes is, happily, one of great profundity. Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath” (132). By using the narrator to argue against this theory, the novel manages to create some distance between itself and these theories, presenting them as theories that are interesting, but not necessarily true. However, even by just bringing up this suggestion and showing that “there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them” (132), *Orlando* does ultimately frame this idea as one that is worthy of consideration when trying to answer questions about gender and gender differences, even if it is not actually completely supported in the novel itself.

Orlando uses the narrator in a similar way to introduce other more experimental theories on gender and gender differences. The narrator proposes theories and suggestions about gender that are reminiscent of the theories of the sexologists Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, while also contradicting himself in the same paragraph, taking away some of the credibility of these theories. After the narrator argues that "[c]lothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath" (132), he continues on to suggest that:

> Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is very opposite of what is above. (132-133)

The suggestion that "[d]ifferent though the sexes are, they intermix" (132) is reminiscent of Edward Carpenter's idea that though there are specific and unique traits associated with either sex that differentiate the two, and thus that there are significant differences between masculine men and feminine women, a large number of individuals also exist in which both 'male' and 'female' traits can be found and in which the two genders can therefore be said to "intermix." At the same time, the suggestion that it is possible, for some individuals, that "underneath the sex is very opposite of what is above" (133) is somewhat similar to Havelock Ellis's suggestion that some individuals, whom he called "sexual inverts," may exist who, despite biologically being one sex, actually are the opposite sex in their minds. The theories are similar in that they both suggest that it is possible for an individual's actual gender to be different from the gender they outwardly appear to be in society. In introducing these theories, the novel appears to call attention to the variety of different ways in which one could approach questions about gender and gender differences, while at the same time reinforcing that anatomy does not determine an individual's behavior, as this is something Ellis and Carpenter's ideas both imply. However, the narrator's suggestion that often the clothes of an individual "keep the likeness" of one gender while they are inwardly another gender actively contradicts his earlier statement that "[c]lothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath" (132), because if it is possible for an individual to wear clothes that do not match what sex or gender they are "underneath", then clothes are, in that case, not a symbol of "something hid deep beneath." The narrator's views, therefore, lose credibility, and cannot be interpreted as a suggestion that the novel is actually trying to argue. It appears then that the novel here once again uses the narrator to be able to bring up experimental theories that it deems worthy of consideration, without actually arguing that either theory is true.

Interestingly, however, the novel not only introduces sexologist ideas in the abovementioned passage but also proposes a wholly new idea. Where Ellis and Carpenter believed "sexual inverts" or "intermediate" men and women to be rare in society, the narrator, as Helt also points out, implies that these phenomena are actually surprisingly common, and occur in almost everyone (Helt 148). Helt appears to believe that this particular view does actually reflect Woolf's own opinions on sexologist theories, as throughout her article she points out various times that where sexologists and other philosophers felt that thinking, feeling, or behaving like the opposite sex was an indication of belonging to a unique class of human beings, Woolf believed this was normal (Helt 131, 140, 142, 147-148). This could be an argument for taking the narrator's words more seriously, as Woolf might have used him to express some of her own opinions, but at the same time, it does not take away the fact that this suggestion only ever appears as a suggestion in the novel, and is never actually confirmed through examples. The novel, then, may not necessarily support the narrator's theories, but they are nonetheless interesting to consider as they might still contain suggestions and ideas that Woolf herself actually might have believed in.

In following Orlando's journey of becoming a woman and exploring the ways in which her change in sex does and does not affect her, *Orlando* is able to examine in great detail what the differences between men and women are, and to what extent they are the result of either anatomy or society. The novel shows that Orlando's change in anatomy itself does not actually change Orlando, as it is not until she re-enters English society and is perceived to be a woman in that society that she actually changes to become and behave more like a woman. Anatomy is still shown to have some effect on the differences between men and women, but only in that it determines what behaviors individuals are being taught in society – it does not actually say anything about the inherent capabilities of any gender in itself. Orlando's journey shows how women learn to behave in ways that are different from men because of the different expectations that are placed upon them by society, which creates differences between the two genders that otherwise would not have existed. *Orlando's* core argument, then, can be said to be a pre-war feminist one, as it aligns strongly with the pre-war feminist idea that the differences between men and women are not in fact determined by biology, but rather are socially and culturally constructed. The novel also briefly explores sexologist views and other more experimental ideas on gender, such as the idea that clothes could be the only distinction between men and women, but ultimately draws no final conclusion on any of these ideas, leaving them as ideas that are interesting to consider, but cannot be accepted as the truth quite yet.

Chapter 4: *A Room of One's Own*

After finishing *Orlando*, Woolf found herself interested in writing "a history, say of Newnham or the women's movement, in the same vein" (Gilbert xxxv). Where *Orlando* followed the history of one person and how she changed over a period of hundreds of years, the essay *A Room of One's Own* focuses on the history of women writers as a whole over the same period of time. The essay explores the difficulties women writers faced in the past compared to their male counterparts, and in doing so it sketches a detailed picture of how social influences through the years may have created differences between men and women when it comes to writing. Despite being an essay, *A Room of One's Own* can in many ways be treated the same as Woolf's novels, since the majority of the work tells the story of the writing process of the fictional author of the work. "Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact" (2-3), Woolf explains at the beginning of her essay, before continuing to use her fictional story to illustrate what various scholars have already singled out as the work's main argument: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (2). The essay shows that even though women might have an equal gift for writing as men, their place in society throughout history has made it impossible for them to nurture that gift to the same extent as men. *A Room of One's Own* also explores both the idea that natural differences may exist between men's and women's writing and a contemporary theory of androgyny, but ultimately argues that perceived or existing differences between the two genders' ability to write are predominantly created by society.

Perhaps the clearest example *A Room of One's Own* gives of society preventing women from becoming great writers is the story of Shakespeare's sister. This hypothetical story of Judith Shakespeare, a woman who has the exact same gift for writing as her brother William, explores how the social circumstances in the sixteenth century would have prevented even the most gifted women from being able to write. The essay points out that while William

Shakespeare likely went "to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin – Ovid, Virgil, and Horace – and the elements of grammar and logic" (56), his "extraordinarily gifted sister … remained at home" (56). Even though she was "as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was" (56), Judith

> was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. (56)

The essay here clearly shows that while men had access to a literary education that could benefit their writing, women did not. Instead, women were encouraged not to engage in literature or writing at all, which, along with their lack of education, made it more difficult for them to become good writers than it was for men.

The essay continues to show that entering the world of theatre was also more difficult for women. Despite the fact that Shakespeare "began by holding horses at the stage door" (56), the essay explains that "[v]ery soon he got work in theatre, and became a successful actor, and lived at the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practicing his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets" (56). Shakespeare, then, was able to quickly enter the world of theatre, getting the chance to practice his writing and gain the experience needed to become a great playwright. However, if his sister would have tried to enter the world of theatre in the same way, she would not have been as successful:

> She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face. The manager – a fat, loose-lipped man – guffawed. He bellowed something about poodles dancing and women acting – no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress. (57)

The essay, here, clearly illustrates that, in Shakespeare's time, no woman could have been as successful as a writer as Shakespeare was, because social attitudes toward women and their abilities would have made it impossible for any woman to enter the world of theatre and get the theatre experience needed to be able to write great plays. Through the story of Judith Shakespeare, the essay is able to show that even if a woman had existed who had been equally gifted and talented as Shakespeare, the social circumstances of the time would have prevented her from ever being able to have a career like Shakespeare's. *A Room of One's Own*, then, clearly suggests that this difference between men and women – that men are able to become great writers while women are not – is the result of society rather than inherent skills or capabilities.

A Room of One's Own does, indeed, imply that women are inherently capable writers, even if few to no great female writers have emerged in history. Though the essay does suggest that "it is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have had Shakespeare's genius" (58), it does not say that this is impossible. In fact, it actually argues that "genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working classes" (58). This suggestion that women could have a natural talent for writing is reinforced when the essay discusses the letters of a woman called Dorothy Osborne. The essay points out that despite the fact that Dorothy "wrote nothing" (75) because she believed that "no woman of sense and modesty could write books" (75), her letters show that she actually has a great gift for writing: "what a gift that untaught and solitary girl had for the framing of a sentence, for the fashioning of a scene" (75). The essay concludes that "[o]ne could have sworn that she had the makings of a writer in her" (76), arguing that Dorothy could have been a great writer if only she had not been made to believe that women could not write. Dorothy is also not the only woman who is shown to have a gift for writing. The writing of Jane Austen is heavily praised as well, to the point that it is even equated to that of Shakespeare: "Here was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching. That was how Shakespeare wrote" (81). *A Room of One's Own*, then, strongly suggests that women are inherently equally gifted at writing as men, which implies that any difference in their ability to write or in the quality of their writing must indeed be caused by the society they live in.

As Judith Shakespeare’s story has already shown, women’s lack of education and their exclusion from the professional world of theatre and writing is an important factor when it comes to the reason why women have found themselves unable to write as well as men. However, another influential societal factor that often prevents women from becoming (great) writers is simply the prevalence of the belief that women could not write. When discussing the case of Dorothy, the essay points out that “one can measure the opposition that was in the air to a woman writing when one finds that even a woman with a great turn for writing has brought herself to believe that to write a book was to be ridiculous” (76), calling attention to how strong of an influence society could have on a woman’s choice to write. The essay also points out that “[t]he indifference of the world which Keats and Flaubert and other men of genius have found so hard to bear was in her case not indifference but hostility” (63), showing that while men might struggle to write because the world does not care about their work, women face a much bigger obstacle. The essay points out that “there was an enormous body of masculine opinion to the effect that nothing could be expected of women intellectually” (65), and that this hostility “must have lowered her vitality, and told profoundly upon her work” (65). The essay here argues what has already been shown in *To the Lighthouse,* when Lily Briscoe struggles to finish her painting after remembering Mr. Tansley’s insistence that women cannot paint or write: discouragement can affect an artist so strongly that it prevents them from continuing or completing their work. *A Room of One’s Own,* here, appears to build on this suggestion by arguing that the level of hostility women faced when it came to being an artist did not only prevent women from being able to finish their work, but could even deter them from writing or painting altogether.

A Room of One's Own also argues that discouragement does not only affect female writers' ability to start or complete a written work, but also affects the quality of said work. The opposition to women's writing that is voiced by men creates in women both a desire to defend themselves and prove that they are, in fact, capable writers, as well as a feeling of anger for being kept from writing. If this anger shines through in a work of literature, the essay argues, it can actually be said to lower the quality of this work. When discussing the poetry of Lady Winchilsea, the essay notes the following:

> Clearly her mind has by no means 'consumed all impediments and become incandescent'. On the contrary, it is harassed and distracted with hates and grievances. The human race is split up for her into two parties. Men are the 'opposing faction'; men are hated and feared, because they have the power to bar her way to what she wants to do – which is to write. (70)

The essay then continues to claim that Lady Winchilsea's anger, caused by men's opposition to her writing, obscures her true genius and therefore prevents her work from being as great as it could have been. "It was a thousand pities," the essay concludes, "that the woman who could write like that, whose mind was tuned to nature and reflection, should have been forced to anger and bitterness" (72). However, the essay also points out that it would have been almost impossible for Lady Winchilsea to not have been affected by society's views of her as a female writer: "how could she have helped herself? I asked, imagining the sneers and the laughter, the adulation of the toadies, the scepticism of the professional poet" (72). The essay here once again highlights just how much influence social circumstances could have on the quality of women's writing. *A Room of One's Own,* then, here clearly shows that society's view that women cannot write as well as men creates a self-fulfilling reality in which women indeed cannot write as well as men. Their writing is affected by the constant discouragement and hostility they face in society, and society, in that sense, can here be said to create a difference between men and women when it comes to the quality of their writing.

In addition to anger and discouragement, another societal factor that influences the quality of women's writing is their lack of opportunities to have a wide variety of experiences that could enrich their writing. This issue is brought up when the essay discusses Charlotte Brontë's writing and the factors that have prevented it from being great, according to the fictional narrator. As was the case with Lady Winchilsea, one of the factors affecting Brontë's work is anger: "it is clear that anger was tampering with the integrity of Charlotte Brontë the novelist" (88). Since the fictional narrator deems integrity to be "the backbone of the writer" (88), the suggestion that anger "tampers" with Brontë's integrity here implies that it prevents her from having one of the most important qualities of a great writer. However, as the essay points out: "there were many more influences than anger tugging at her imagination and deflecting it from its path" (88). One of these "influences" is her lack of experience and knowledge about the world:

> she puts her finger exactly not only upon her own defects as a novelist but upon those of her sex at that time. She knew, no one better, how enormously her genius would have profited if it had not spent itself in solitary visions over distant fields; if experience and intercourse and travel had been granted her. But they were not granted; they were withheld; (84)

Women were often unable to have the same enriching experiences as men, as they were often poor and confined to the house (84-85). Men, on the other hand, were able to have a wide variety of experiences:

> At the same time, on the other side of Europe, there was a young man living freely with

> this gipsy or with that great lady; going to the wars; picking up unhindered and uncensored all that varied experience of human life which served him so splendidly later when he came to write his books. (85)

The essay even points out that if men had lived like women did, they might not have been able to write their greatest works: “Had Tolstoy lived at the Priory in seclusion with a married lady ‘cut off from what is called the world’, however edifying the moral lesson, he could scarcely, I thought, have written *War and Peace*” (85). *A Room of One’s Own*, then, clearly shows how the fact that women were prevented from traveling and having the same enriching experiences as men has also influenced the quality of their writing.

However, despite the essay’s strong arguments supporting the suggestion that differences between men and women are societal, *A Room of One’s Own* also contains various phrases and arguments that imply that there is actually an inherent difference between men and women. According to the essay, an important reason why Jane Austen and Emily Brontë were such successful writers, was because “[t]hey wrote as women write, not as men write” (90). In the essay, a significant amount of emphasis is placed on the fact that women and men write differently. It is said that the man’s sentence “was a sentence that was unsuited for a woman’s use” (93), and that a woman should not try to use it in her writing if she wants to succeed: “Charlotte Brontë, with all her splendid gift for prose, stumbled and fell with that clumsy weapon in her hands” (93). Jane Austen, on the other hand, “looked at it and laughed at it and devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use and never departed from it. Thus, with less genius for writing than Charlotte Brontë, she got infinitely more said” (93). *A Room of One’s Own* here strongly implies that the existing writing tradition as developed and used by men is not suited for women, and that women need their own tradition and “sentence” to write well. “[S]uch a lack of tradition, such a scarcity and inadequacy of tools, must have told enormously upon the writing of women” (93), the essay argues, reinforcing the suggestion that the quality of women’s writing is affected by the lack of an existing writing tradition that suits them. The essay then goes on to suggest that men and women write differently because “the nerves that feed the brain would seem to differ in men and women, and if you are going to make them work their best and hardest, you must find out what treatment suits them” (94-95). *A Room of One’s Own* here implies that there is a natural difference between men and women when it comes to the way they write, and that because of this natural difference, women cannot succeed as writers as long as the only existing writing tradition is one that is devised for and by men.

This idea that men and women are naturally different in certain aspects initially appears to contradict the main suggestion that has been developed in each of the three works that have been discussed in this thesis so far, as each of these works, including *A Room of One’s Own*, has been shown to argue that the differences between men and women are mostly societal rather than natural. However, when analyzing *A Room of One’s Own* more closely, it becomes clear that this emphasis on the differences between men and women does not contradict the central idea that men and women are naturally highly similar. One of the reasons *A Room of One’s Own* calls attention to the differences between men and women is because it suggests the following: “Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities? For we have too much likeness as it is” (106-107). The essay here implies that the few natural differences between men and women that do exist are important precisely because the genders are so similar in other ways. The essay then clearly still implies that men and women are naturally more similar than they are different. The essay also never implies that this natural difference between men and women means that women are inherently less capable of writing, just that it is important to recognize that they write differently, and need a different writing tradition to realize their full potential. Since the development and popularity of a specific writing tradition are dependent on societal factors, the argument, then, again comes down to the fact that women are not as successful as writers because societal factors do not work in favor of female writers, and this argument is perfectly in line with the main argument that has been presented in *A Room of One's Own* and in Woolf's other works so far.

The suggestion that society creates differences between men and women is not the only theory about gender that *A Room of One's Own* discusses. Toward the end of the essay, a theory surrounding the concept of androgyny which implies that it is possible for men to naturally have 'female' qualities and the other way around is also brought up. The fictional author of the essay here wonders whether perhaps "there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness" (118). Each individual, she speculates, has a male and female part of the brain, and those parts need to be equally present and utilized to achieve happiness. The essay here strongly implies that it is not only possible for men and women to have both 'male' and 'female' qualities, but that this is, in fact, normal or even desired. In the end, the fictional author concludes that "[s]ome collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished" (126), implying that this intermediate or androgynous mind in which both 'male' and 'female' qualities are equally present is necessary to be able to create good art. *A Room of One's Own,* then, appears to suggest that androgyny is not only possible but also desirable or even necessary to become a great writer.

However, whether *A Room of One's Own* truly supports this suggestion or not is a matter that is still disputed among scholars. Sandra Gilbert praises *A Room of One's Own*'s "advocacy of a creative androgyny that recalls Edward Carpenter's celebration of a 'third' or 'intermediate sex'" (xxxvi), suggesting both that the essay indeed argues that having an androgynous mind leads to creative success and that this advocacy is a reference to – or perhaps even a show of support for – Edward Carpenter's theories of gender. Gilbert is not the only one to believe that *A Room of One's Own* truly advocates androgyny, as Laura Marcus points out when she writes that "*A Room of One's Own* was seen by many critics to subdue and repress women's anger in favour of a more serene gender-transcendent or androgynous creativity" (162). However, at the same time, there are also scholars like Brenda Helt who argue the opposite. Helt claims that, in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf "disputes the possibility of androgyny, the androgynous mind of the genius, and the intermediate type or third sex" (143). Helt writes that "[w]hile many scholars understand Woolf to promote the concept of the superiority of the androgynous mind, *A Room* as a whole is engaged in encouraging women to write history, psychology, even science from a woman's perspective, not an androgynous one" (151). It appears, then, that Helt suggests that the essay cannot be supporting the theory of androgyny it presents, as this directly contradicts the other arguments that are made in it. Karen Kaivola has also noticed this contradiction between the theory of androgyny and other views presented in the essay, but she draws a different conclusion from this contradiction. She describes Woolf's vision of the androgynous mind as "an idealized synthesis and reconciliation" (256) between the two genders – a mind that transcends the differences between men and women – and then points out that "within *A Room of One's Own* there is a tension between the dream of human unity implicit in the ability to transcend differences that lead to remarkably different experiences or perceptions and the need to acknowledge the reality and importance of such differences" (256). According to Kaivola, the contradiction between the newly introduced theory of androgyny and the earlier stressed importance of the difference between men's and women's writing does not necessarily dismiss either idea, but simply creates tension between them. Out of all of the suggestions presented in this paragraph, Kaivola's suggestion might perhaps be the most accurate one. The lack of consensus among scholars about whether the essay advocates for androgyny or not clearly shows that two opposing attitudes toward the theory of androgyny can be found in the work itself. Androgyny is both presented as an ideal on one hand and called into question by the presence of opposing arguments on the other, which does indeed create a tension that makes it difficult to say whether the essay truly does or does not support this theory.

It appears, then, that like in *Orlando*, this might be a situation in which the work uses the narrator or fictional author to be able to introduce newer and more experimental theories on gender and gender differences that might be interesting to consider, without having to draw any conclusions on them. As both Gilbert and Helt have pointed out, the theory that people could exist who have both a male and female part of their brain – and in whom these parts could even sometimes be said to be perfectly balanced – recalls Edward Carpenter's theories of the existence of 'intermediate' men and women who possessed both 'male' and 'female' qualities at the same time. Like in *Orlando*, this theory is brought up in *A Room of One's Own* in such a way that it can be examined and discussed without necessarily suggesting that it is true. It appears, then, that both *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* are interested in sexologist theories to a certain degree and deem them interesting enough to consider in a discussion about gender and gender differences, but ultimately do not yet have any conclusive opinions on such theories.

Through exploring the relationship between women and fiction through history, *A Room of One's Own* is able to show that, through the years, society has prevented women from being able to become great writers. The essay tells the hypothetical story of Shakespeare's sister to illustrate how women did not get the same education and opportunities as men, which led to them being unable to become (successful) writers. The essay argues that women are in fact inherently equally capable of writing as men, but that their writing is affected both by the opposition they face and by the fact that they are not able to have the same enriching experiences men were able to have. The essay also points out that despite the fact that men and women are inherently similar to a large extent, it is important to pay attention to the few natural differences that do exist between them. Women are said to have their own unique way of writing, which means that they will only be able to write as well as men once a writing tradition has been developed by and for women that suits them and their unique talents. The essay also briefly discusses the theory of the androgynous mind which recalls Carpenter’s theories of the intermediate sex, but it does not clearly argue for or against this theory. *A Room of One’s Own*, then, ultimately argues that, at least when it comes to writing, any perceived or existing differences between men and women are in fact the result of societal factors, as these factors are what creates a reality in which men can be great writers while women cannot.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to discover whether any definitive answers to questions about gender and gender differences can be found in three of Virginia Woolf's works: *To the Lighthouse, Orlando: A Biography,* and *A Room of One's Own*. The thesis focused on questions of whether there are differences between men and women, and if there are, what these differences are, and whether they are natural or cultural. The first chapter sketched the historical context of the time in which the three works were written, and established that questions regarding gender differences were increasingly prevalent at that time. After the Great War, general British society began to question whether men and women were truly as different as Victorian gender ideology insisted they were. At the same time, new theories about gender and gender differences that suggested that men and women might, in many ways, be much more similar than was previously believed were or had already been proposed by contemporary sexologists and pre-war feminists as well.

The second chapter of this thesis analyzed *To the Lighthouse* and its examination of Victorian views on gender. *To the Lighthouse* accurately reflects the prevalence of Victorian gender ideology in the minds of the average early twentieth-century British citizen, while at the same time scrutinizing and criticizing this ideology. *To the Lighthouse* ultimately rejects Victorian answers to questions of gender differences, and in doing so makes room for other theories on gender differences to be considered more seriously now that there no longer is a clear universal answer to questions on gender. *To the Lighthouse* then also suggests that women would be capable of the same feats, skills, and behaviors as men if only they were not held back or shaped by the expectations that are placed upon them by society, implying that differences between men and women might not actually be natural, but the result of societal factors instead.

Orlando builds on *To the Lighthouse's* suggestion about the nature of gender differences, and, as the third chapter of this thesis has shown, develops and presents a strong argument that men and women are inherently more similar than they are different, and that most differences between men and women are actually taught by society. The fourth chapter of this thesis then showed that even though *A Room of One's Own* stresses that there are also important natural differences between men and women, this essay overall agrees with *Orlando* and also argues that most differences between men and women are actually the result of societal factors throughout history.

Both *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* also explore other ideas on gender and gender differences, such as those proposed by early twentieth-century sexologists, and though neither work shows any outright support for these theories, these theories are not completely rejected either. Though Woolf's three works together are shown to overall favor theories about gender that are highly reminiscent of the pre-war feminist theories that society creates differences between men and women that do not necessarily exist naturally, the way in which *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* consider and explore other theories without outright rejecting them implies that ultimately there might not yet be a definitive answer to the questions posed about gender and gender differences. In fact, what these works show is that there are a multitude of possible answers to these questions that are worthy of consideration.

However, despite this awareness that there might be no clear and definitive answer to the questions of gender and gender differences, a strong preference for one possible answer can still clearly be detected throughout the three works. The three works each ultimately argue that clear differences between men and women do exist, but that the majority of these differences are in fact created by social and historical factors rather than the result of an inherent biological difference between the two genders, and thus that there are actually few natural differences between men and women. Despite the fact that this argument can already be detected in each of the works when they are read separately, the argument becomes significantly stronger when these three works are read together. *To the Lighthouse*'s rejection of Victorian gender ideology eliminates this theory as a possible answer, showing exactly why questions about gender and gender differences are relevant. This rejection also lends more credibility to new ideas that contradict Victorian ideology, which otherwise might have been dismissed on the grounds of this ideology. *Orlando* then builds on the suggestions made in *To the Lighthouse* that society might be creating differences between men and women, and is able to explore this theory much more freely and in much greater detail. Finally, *A Room of One's Own*'s genre and its historical approach then serve to lend a sense of credibility and factuality to the rather speculative ideas presented in *Orlando*. The three works together present a clear answer to the questions surrounding gender and gender differences that were prevalent in early twentieth-century Britain that may not be the definitive answer, but is certainly a highly likely and possible one.

At the time these works were written, this answer to questions of gender and gender differences had the potential to have significant implications for the future, especially when it comes to the future of women's rights and feminism. If gender-specific traits and skills were indeed acquired through learning, then it was possible for women to acquire 'male' traits and skills as well. There would be no more reason to confine women to the house and restrict their access to public, 'male' spaces if they could learn how to function equally as well within these spaces as men did. Woolf's work can therefore clearly be read as a support for the idea that women are inherently equally capable as men and therefore deserve to have the same rights and opportunities as men. As a result, Woolf and her work have both become associated with the feminist movement of early twentieth-century Britain, as both have clearly lent support to this movement and its arguments.

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