Gender as a Social Construct: Portrayals of Feminity in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and Orlando

Dalscheid, Chelsea

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Portrayals of Femininity in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando”*

Master’s thesis for Literary Studies: English Literature and Culture

Chelsea Dalscheid

First reader: Prof. Dr. Nidesh Lawtoo

Second reader: Dr. Michael S. Newton

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Introduction

Although Virginia Woolf had a great influence on the feminist movement with her general interest in gender, identity, and women's history, she was certainly also complex in her ideas. In 1929, closely after the publication of *Orlando,* Woolf published the extended essay *A Room of One's Own*. Her essay formulates the materialist argument that women need to have money and a space of their own in order to write and to establish their independent identities. Woolf's novelistic style based on lectures she gave in Cambridge give the book a narrative style (Goldman 71), yet her criticism of the patriarchal structures of education which excluded women is palpable through the prose style. However, her emphasis on seeing women as a "separate class altogether" (Goldman 72) has sparked debates among feminism, as it brings about the discussion of sexual difference, or "social feminism". "Social feminism" is founded on the differences between men and women, in contrast to "equal rights feminism" (Marcus 145), which demands equality of social and civic rights between the two sexes. Hence to this day, Woolf is considered both a precursor of feminism and a controversial figure among feminists. She praises the concept of androgyny, where the two sexes complement each other, while simultaneously excluding women from certain abilities, such as clear and concise writing in Hugh Whitman's instance.

Published in 1925, *Mrs Dalloway* was an immediately acknowledged success and turned Woolf into an established actor of the modernist canon among other writers like Ezra Pound, James Joyce, or Gertrude Stein. Although Clarissa Dalloway, the novel's eponymous heroine, does not stray from the image of the perfect wife and hostess, it nevertheless lends itself to analyse the treatment and behaviour of women in the 1920s. This thesis is committed to analysing these internal monologues in chapter one to discover the limiting attitudes and tensions within the construction of the female gender in the early 20th century. A woman like Mrs. Dalloway is

praised for her hosting skills and her talent to gather people, although Sally Seton is considered unclean and a "ragamuffin" simply because of her lower social standing and her careless behaviour.

Orlando, similarly to A Room of One's Own, has become a crucial novel exploring "the role and perception of gender throughout history, from the Elizabethan period through to the early 20th century"(Woolf vii) in the form of a biography. The transformation from man to woman that Orlando goes through highlights the difference of male and female perspectives on the conventions of womanhood, and the restrictions resulting from such rigid male/ female roles, established in the final chapter. In Orlando's experience, they have broken free from gender roles

Feminist criticism on *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*

Mrs. Dalloway and *Orlando* have been widely assessed by feminist scholars, yet comparative analyses remain scarce.[1] Even though my thesis research focusses on gender roles and their social construction, other scholars have taken the concept of homosexuality as a common factor in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*.[2] In Katherine Mullin's "Modernisms and feminisms", she introduces Woolf's contribution to female modernism, because she was one of the writers who saw "the domestic woman as a version of the artist", especially the "hostess-artist" illustrated by Mrs Dalloway. Instead of belittling the role of the hostess and the tasks a woman in her position has to perform, Woolf depicts Mrs. Dalloway's daily life as art. Woolf carefully describes how the latter proceeds to fill her day, starting with a mundane task such as buying flowers. On the subject of *Mrs. Dalloway* and the conventionality of the novel, Alex Zwerdling

[1] Other comparative analyses of Woolf's novels include Ryan Derek, *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life*, Nandita Adhikary, "The role of Androgyny and Performativity in the Novels of Virginia Woolf: *Orlando & Mrs. Dalloway"* and Jean E. Kernard, "Power and Sexual Ambiguity: the *Dreadnought* Hoax*, The Voyage Out, Mrs. Dalloway*, and *Orlando"*

[2] One example is "The Concept of Homosexuality in Virginia Woolf's works; Mrs. Dalloway and Orlando: A Biography" by Lenka Jirušová

argues that Mrs. Dalloway is "a sympathetic picture of someone who has surrendered to the force of conventional life and permitted her emotions to go underground" (Colesworthy 172). He highlights Clarissa's subservience to society – how she has seemingly accepted her role as wife of Richard Dalloway. As I will show, Clarissa has assumed her role in society which consists in gathering people and socialising. Her ambition is not to stay up to date with politics, like her husband, but to strengthen her husband's reputation and enjoy herself by throwing these elaborate parties.

Nevertheless, the depiction of Clarissa as the conventional wife does not mean that the exploration of her character's mind through free indirect discourse is as heteronormative. Jill Franks states that Woolf's style enables her to "captur[e] the private thoughts of women who are reacting, often violently, against the expectations of others for proper female behaviour" (94). Therefore Mrs. Dalloway is not limited or confined by the female gender that has been attributed to her.[3] The fondness with which she looks back on her romantic love for Sally proves that she is capable of challenging sexual norms, though she was not able to fully transgress them. This claim is further supported by Michael Payne, who lays particular emphasis on the transcendence of sexual roles.[4] He encourages readers of Woolf to look beyond the gender of a person and take them for what they are. He highlights a passage in *Mrs. Dalloway* where Clarissa feels her pieces of her presence throughout London: "She felt herself everywhere; not "here, here, here"; (…) but everywhere" (Woolf 135). Here she describes herself as a presence, an assembly of memories spread throughout the city and the people she meets rather than a woman. It demonstrates that Woolf focusses on the person rather than their gender, a progressive take for a 20th century novel which implicitly anticipated the movement of LGBTQIA+ community.

[3] See Jill Franks (118) for a complete exploration of Clarissa Dalloway's consciousness
[4] See Michael Payne (2)

The idea of looking at oneself as a presence rather than a gendered person is primarily explored in *Orlando*: as Orlando goes through their gender transformations, the narrator reminds us that they do not feel any different. The expectations society imposes on a woman are what make Orlando conform to certain rules, such as wear more feminine clothing. Ryan Derek rightly points out that "the stability of the male/female binary is, for example, continuously challenged by the narrator/biographer's reiteration that Orlando is only classified as male or female because this is what society – and language – expects" (103). The strict categorisation into one gender or another is a rule that has been instated by society, but for Orlando it is not a necessity since they always feel like themselves, no matter the clothes or the gender they have been attributed. Ryan Derek's quote reminds us of Simone de Beauvoir's claim that one is born a person who is later socialised into identifying with women or men. Her claim introduces the differences between essentialist and constructivist approach. The essentialist approach sees the biological sex of a person as the defining factor of one's gender, whereas the constructivist approach, highlighted by Beauvoir, relies on the socialisation and the gender one is accustomed to grow into.

Naturally, socialisation entails something as simple as clothing which has power over one's gender identity. Dressing like a woman brings with it certain cultural, social, end economic conditions which limit a person to their female gender role.[5] While Orlando was travelling with gypsies she didn't dress like a woman, therefore she did not notice the restrictions she is confronted with when she comes to England as a woman. I will return to the societal constraints women endure in chapter 2 of my thesis. When reading Orlando, it becomes evident that a change of sex does not equate to an immediate alteration of identity. However, the scholar Patrick C. Hogan has raised the great influence of different circumstances depending one one's

[5] See Alberto García García-Madrid (107)

gender and "ongoing, shallow socialisation" (198) which gradually alter Orlando's personality traits on a superficial level.

Sexual difference and androgyny in *A Room of One's Own*

Before delving into the analysis of Mrs. Dalloway and Orlando, I intend to take a detour into Woolf's personal relationship with feminism, which she elaborately wrote down in her manifesto *A Room of One's Own*. After the admission of the Suffrage Bill, Woolf attacked the word feminism in *Three Guineas*, by concluding:

> "That word, according to the dictionary, means 'one who champions the right of women'. Since the only right, the right to earn a living has been won, the word no longer has a meaning. And a word without a meaning is a dead word, a corrupt word" (qtd. in Walters 2).

At that time, women were still not equal to men, yet the English writer was open to burying the word since what it tried to achieve, namely the professionalisation of women, had been fulfilled.

Having claimed feminism a "dead" word, she exposed her "alternating loyalty to and deviation from" the familiar positions of feminist movements, as Laura Marcus asserts (Marcus 144). What sparked the tension within Virginia Woolf's feminist opinion most was her attitude towards sexual difference between women and men in correlation with a quote from *A Room of One's Own*, advocating for a gender-blind literature:

> It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman. (Woolf 103)

In her opinion, it was truly "fatal" to write anything while considering one's biological sex, since it would inevitably evoke a "conscious bias" and thus be "doomed to death" (103). How does that argument fit in with the female sentence and the call for women to have special and financial independence from their husbands or fathers? The quoted passage criticises the "misplaced over consciousness of a rigid division between two sexes" (Derek 67). Similarly, Woolf is aware of the problematic of keeping up this asymmetrical establishment and "consciousness" of sexual difference. Ryan Derek argues that "it reasserts the binary framework that keeps men and women apart" (68). Simone de Beauvoir supported the argument of social constructionists, and society's influence on and separation of gender by asserting that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (LeBoeuf 5). She thus adheres to a constructivist feminism, which asserts that it is a person's outside circumstances and their socialisation which prompt them to develop either masculine or female values.

Furthermore, Simone de Beauvoir picks up on the difference between sex and gender: biological sex is the attribute one is given through birth, whereas gender is socially constructed and changes throughout a life.[6] Judith Butler echoes a similar sentiment in *Gender Trouble:* "regardless of one's biological sex, a person begins as a mix of possibilities and acquires a gender as that individual sheds other feminine qualities (and becomes masculine) or masculine qualities (and becomes feminine)" (Rooney 106). Here, the example of Orlando as a woman is an adequate representation of external influence on gender – only upon embarking on the ship to England and encountering the male gaze does she realise the effect her skin and her feminine attributes have on men.

Throughout her feminist manifesto Virginia Woolf declares how natural it seems to be that male and female values differ, simultaneously criticising the choice to prioritise the former: "Yet it

[6] Celine LeBoeuf "Sex belongs on the side of nature, gender on the side of culture" (85)

is the masculine values that prevail" (72). In the concluding pages of that chapter, she employs various versions of the verb "to differ", yet the insistence on the difference between both sexes is weakened by the verb "seem":

> Again, the nerves that feed the brain would seem to *differ* in men and women, (…) – what alternations of work and rest they need, interpreting rest not as doing nothing but as doing something but something that is *different*; and what should that difference be? (Woolf 76).

These brief examples prove the omnipresence of the question of sexual difference which threads itself though *A Room of One's Own*. Upon that passage, the critic Laura Marcus remarked the inability to judge what this difference is rooted in, its nature, origins, the influences of history, circumstance, and perspective, as well as the difficulty to measure its scope in relation to these factors (Marcus 153).

These differences between male and female come together in Virginia Woolf's use of androgyny – "multiplicity", in other words the collaboration between the two sexes, is "the very condition of writing sexual difference" (Derek 70). In her chapter on Woolf and *A Room of One's Own,* Adriana Cavarero also defined Woolf's use of the two sexes as complementary rather than opposite and self-sufficient as having become "two atemporal essences, two complementary party of an originary unity, which is to say the androgyne", like the ideal person according to Plato (41). It is also the path Orlando chooses by the end of their autobiography: embracing her gender fluidity, and benefitting from both conventionally masculine and feminine character traits.

By close reading the language in *Mrs Dalloway* and *Orlando* and leaning on second-wave feminist theories, my thesis intends to explore the representation of the female gender, in addition to the novels' attribution to the debate between sexual difference and gender as a

cultural or social construct. The French philosopher Simone De Beauvoir as well as the gender theorist Judith Butler have both impacted the notion of gender as a constructed identity immensely and they lend themselves to the interpretation of Woolf's works.

Chapter 1: The Representation of Women in *Mrs Dalloway*

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf introduces the reader to a series of characters who know each other through a common social network. We primarily receive insights into Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus and Peter Walsh's consciousnesses. In opposition to the masculine figure, who is autonomous, women in novels were characterised by their "maternal inclination", meaning to bear and raise children. Cavarero argues that in most novels of the early 20th century, that was "supposedly (…) the true female essence" (42). When interpreted in relation to Mrs. Dalloway, her essence and inclination have shifted: after raising her daughter, she has transferred the attention to caring for Mr. Dalloway and for hosting. She is "pendent"[7] on organising social gatherings as well as depending on keeping up her constructed image as the perfect wife. The latter creates a tension between the female essence, consisting of caring for children and the household, and the cultural representation and construct women adhere to.

This chapter focusses on Clarissa's perspective, through which I deduce the norms and restrictions imposed on women in the early 20th century. Moreover, I analyse how Mrs. Dalloway curates her own image she presents to the people she meets. Though she appears to be acquiescing with heteronormativity at the beginning of the novel, the reader discovers that there is a divergence between young Clarissa, in love with another woman, and middle-aged Clarissa.

[7] See Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, 'Chapter 3: Virginia Woolf and the Shadow of the "I"', p. 43

In the second part of the chapter, I demonstrate how figures such as Lady Bruton and Sally Seton go against the grain of social conventionality. Sally's relationship with Clarissa and Lady Bruton's androgynous nature break the conventionality of the novel. In regard to their sexuality, Eve Sedgwick[8] has poignantly summed up the consequences of society's rigid system:

> "After the categorical segregation of humanity into the allegedly complementary halves of the male/masculine and female/feminine, the body of sexuality has been equally dissected, leaving us with two distinct species of human beings locked into two rigidly demarcated and mutually exclusive circuits of desire" (Rooney 284)

Heterosexuality has thus become a "systematically constructed and controlled" system. The notion of human beings that are "locked in" conveys oppression: heterosexuality is a law imposed on women and men alike, though it takes different shapes. For instance, a man should behave in a masculine way, take care of his family financially, be the rational counterpart to his supposedly emotional female counterpart, even if it means hiding a part of one's identity. The rigid heterosexual system has had an impact on both Mrs Dalloway and Sally, as well as Lady Bruton, whose sexual preferences remain to be questioned.

1.1 Mrs Dalloway – the perfect hostess?

The beginning of the novel exposes a duality, a tension that exists within the character of Clarissa Dalloway. While the opening sentence: "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself" (Woolf 5) indicates that Clarissa is doing something independently[9], which shows her agency, the sentence defines her in relation to her husband Richard Dalloway. It is immediately clear that she is a middle-aged woman married to a conservative MP. In contrast

[8] Quote taken from *Epistemology of the Closet*

[9] Critic Tyler Clark emphasizes Clarissa's appreciation for the mundane things in life: "for all her flaws and reputation as a trivial and snobbish socialite, embodies an uninhibited joy for life" (42). While she is out to buy flowers she takes "melancholy pleasure" from the excursion and meeting people she knows.

to her husband's politically important tasks, she oversees hosting, gathering what she needs for her party, and most importantly presents herself in an admirable light – her ambition is to "kindle and illuminate; to give her party" (Woolf 7). Hosting is what gives her pride and joy: "To dance, to ride, she had adored all that" (8). The initial description of Clarissa perfectly plays into the image of the shallow and superficial wife of a wealthy man. Her former lover, Peter Walsh, encapsulates this divide between men and women, by stating that "It was the state of the world that interested him" (Woolf 8), meaning politics and history instead of what a beautiful day it was or how nice Mrs. Dalloway might look at the party.

Clarissa is aware of her "lack" of worldly knowledge, as she admits early on in the novel, yet at the same time she is aware of her qualities, which include her good intuition upon meeting new people: "She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, (…). Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct" (Woolf 9-10). Although she might not be versed on world politics, she has social skills in terms of recognising people's character. Clarissa is continuously trying to find out the impact her parties have on others. She settles on the conclusion that her interpersonal skills are a gift from her to her guests, since she does not have anything else to offer:

> Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; could not think, write, even play the piano. She muddled Armenians and Turks; loved success; hated discomfort; must be liked; talked oceans of nonsense; and to this day, ask her what the Equator is, and she did not know (Woolf 109).

She grew up learning how to host, be nice and welcoming in presence of other people. She is not used to talking of politics and geography like Lady Bruton, and she is aware of that intellectual lack. At the same time, Jill Franks correctly emphasises that "[Mrs. Dalloway] demonstrate[s] the inextricability of class and gender issues, insofar as the protagonists take on

the politics of their male protectors. Mrs. Dalloway is married to a Conservative MP, thereby limiting her awareness of, and ability to relate to, the lower classes" (Franks 94). Inevitably, she is limited by her class and the social class she was destined to conform to.

In a sense, Richard Dalloway is her perfect partner because he complements what she lacks – an interest in world events and humanity. Richard is a man who does not care about what others might think of him, he does things for "the sake of them" as Clarissa details, which is an essential difference between the partners. She regrets that "half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make people think this or that" (Woolf 11). In her chapter on "Androgyny and Gender Performance in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (…)", critic Jill Franks asserts the following: "Clarissa resents the fact that she (femininely) performs acts so that others will think her nice, unlike her husband, who does things for their own sake." There is always an element of performance included in Clarissa's behaviour, because, as a woman of a certain class, she is bound to carefully curate her public image. In addition to the curation of what she wants others to perceive, she is defined by her union with Richard Dalloway. Mrs. Dalloway has to come to terms with what it means to be a woman after all the expected milestones have been accomplished.

Mrs. Dalloway signals that Clarissa has become the wife and mother of someone rather than a person to be admired for herself – this loss is a reasonable explanation for her longing to be seen, courted and popular in their social sphere:

> She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only (…) this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway (Woolf 11).

The quote stated above signals a loss of individual identity. Their whole lives women are told to seek out male attention, to marry well, and to become mothers, yet the aftermath appears to

be harder to navigate for Woolf's protagonist. Reid emphasises the dangers of "self-extinction" which loom beneath sacrificing one's own life for family, thus she condemns the female conduct: "'Womanly' behaviour, in practice, means 'good humour and attention to her husband, keeping her children neat and clean, and attending to domestic arrangements'" (Walters 41-42). Although Clarissa's daughter no longer needs taking care of, the former has replaced it with caring for her husband and his image she keeps up with social events. Sally knew what would become of Clarissa as soon as she married Dalloway, so she implored Peter "to save her from the Hughs and the Dalloways and all the 'perfect gentlemen' who would 'stifle her soul' (…), make a mere hostess of her, encourage her worldliness". However, that is exactly what happened to Mrs. Dalloway. She has been reduced to the identity of someone's wife, and she has become the perfect hostess with respectable manners, an important characteristic I will return to in the course of the chapter. She is dependent on her husband, so when she leaves him for a lunch with another woman, an all-encompassing loneliness surges, as if Richard had decided to leave her forever.[10]

Richard's relationship with Lady Bruton plays into Clarissa's loss of identity and objective. She becomes self-conscious of her age as well as of her hold on Richard. "But she feared time itself, and read on Lady Bruton's face, as if it had been a dial cut in impassive stone, the dwindling of life" (Woolf 28) indicates that Clarissa fears old age, in particular when she sees how Lady Bruton has grown older at the age of 62, which is her future. The fact that Lady Bruton did not invite Clarissa reinforces her feeling "shrivelled, aged, breastless" (29), as if she had been used to her fullest potential and then discarded. According to Jill Franks, it is a universal experience women go through once they have started menopause, "a time in which women take stock of their lives and have to reckon with the loss of their youth femininity"

[10] Quotation paraphrased, see *Mrs. Dalloway* (43)

(105). She points out women's fear of maturation since it also provokes a decline in male attention.

The conventions imposed on women are no less stressful to Clarissa than witnessing the passing of time. Woolf has interspersed social rules throughout the novel. Although they might appear small and unimportant, they make sure that women stay as ordered as they should be. For instance, the descriptions the narrator gives "women must put off their rich apparel. At mid-day they must disrobe" (29) and "as a woman gathers her things together, her cloak, her gloves, her opera-glasses, and gets up to go out of the theatre into the street" (43-44) imply that there are certain manners women follow when structuring their day or appearing in public. Especially the evocation of how a woman "gathers" her belongings is reminiscent of a universally known female code of conduct. Clarissa raises the notion of "composing herself", putting effort into her appearance and behaviour to be compatible with society's rules on how to be a woman: "That was her self – pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together" (Woolf 34). These are thoughts that rush through her mind as she ponders her made-up reflection in the mirror. If Clarissa Dalloway did not put effort into her appearance, she probably would not be as well-respected.

The importance of Clarissa's "ignorant" upbringing and its influence on her behaviour is worth deconstructing. Peter Walsh criticises how "(…) in those days a girl brought up as she was knew nothing" and he is annoyed by her "timid; hard; arrogant; prudish" (Woolf 54) behaviour she had been socialised into. Since this comment stems from a man, it implies that he has positioned himself as superior to her, otherwise he would not pass such a condemning judgement on her. Simultaneously, he extends his critique by generalising all the girls who grew up in similar households to Clarissa, who were sheltered from the real world, only accustomed to being respectable young women. Besides, Peter made her feel like a "mere silly chatterbox", "frivolous and empty-minded" (Woolf 40), which indicates that he does not have

a high opinion of women, and that disrespect is tangible. In contrast to Clarissa with her "perfect manners, like a real hostess" (Woolf 56), young Sally Seton is remembered by both of them as a woman of "great daring". Nevertheless, she could not escape the conventionality of marriage and childbirth either. The "wild, the daring, the romantic" Sally had succumbed to becoming a mother of five boys and a wealthy husband.[11]

Judith Butler picks up on the influence of upbringing and its favouring of feminine over masculine characteristics and vice versa in *Gender Trouble*. She asserts that, at the beginning of a life, people have both female and masculine qualities within them yet as they grow older, external influences shape which qualities are more prevalent than the others: "Regardless of one's biological sex, a person begins as a mix of possibilities and acquires a gender as that individual sheds other feminine qualities (and becomes masculine) or masculine qualities (and becomes feminine)" (Rooney 106). In Clarissa's case, she was brought up in a manner that called for the exacerbation of her feminine qualities.

Having access to Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts enables the reader to find out what matters to her, which is to "do something, be something" (Woolf 69). Clarissa thinks about the duchesses and countesses that she admires because they portray is what she aims to achieve. She respects their upright image, their rigidity, and their courage. They are the epitome of high social standing and respectability that Clarissa adheres to when she hosts her events. The emphasis on doing shows that Mrs. Dalloway wants to stay active and participate in society, even though she is married. "Be[ing] something" evokes social status and respect one only gains by persevering. To "be something" adds another layer of performance to Mrs Dalloway's character – she carefully constructs what she wants people to see.

[11] See *Mrs. Dalloway (*65) for full quote

In the novel, Mrs. Dalloway puts all her attention into being a hostess and a good wife, thereby she conforms to patriarchal social expectations. She gradually reveals that she has become a hostess for the sake of Richard, just as Sally had foreshadowed before their marriage even took place. As the wife of Mr. Dalloway who has a social network of important and wealthy people surrounding him, her "genius" for hosting and gathering people is a practical character trait. Nevertheless, it is also a consuming pastime that she undertakes purely to serve her husband: "These parties, for example, were all for him, or for her idea of him (to do Richard justice he would have been happier farming in Norfolk)" (Woolf 69). This quote reveals that she throws these parties for her husband, to keep up his image, or the "idea" of him. Richard Dalloway seems to be a simple man who would rather spend time working outside than stuck inside a pompously decorated room full of acquaintances. Nevertheless, the image society and his wife have curated for him insists that such gatherings must take place to ensure social connections are preserved. The idea of Richard Dalloway is interconnected with the notion of being something, which Virginia Woolf uses to point to the constructivist view of women.

The superficial façade of hosting is uncovered through the sober perspective of Peter Walsh: "and behind it all was that network of visiting, leaving cards, being kind to people; running about with bunches of flowers, (…); all that interminable traffic women of her sort keep up" (69). His point of view highlights that hosting is a woman's job, women have to take care to show their admiration and attentiveness for other people's stories. Thus, hosting is another societal convention women adhere to while displaying their manners and respectability. As a hostess, Clarissa scours the room to greet her guests with a joyous face. Peter has known her since they were young, so his judgement of her authenticity and her "natural instinct" for hosting indicates that Clarissa does enjoy gathering people, even if it's for the sake of her husband.

It is interesting to note that Peter calls Clarissa's social networking an "interminable traffic" that especially "women of her sort" keep up, which picks up on his previous criticism of her upbringing. Since social gatherings are a joyful occasion for Clarissa, Peter's choice of words creates a tension. To summarise catching up with people as "traffic" implies a negative connotation, as it is reminiscent of being stuck in traffic with a lot of people. He conveys that it is a nuisance or even worse, that Clarissa and other guests are selling their personalities to each other through this "trafficking". The sales connotation of the word also dehumanises Clarissa and the guests of her parties – "trafficking" objectifies them, they are just bodies being traded within these social gatherings. In addition, it is "interminable" which indicates that it is an endless and boring occupation. His dislike for her parties increases even further as Woolf keeps the narrative tied to his free indirect discourse. He regrets that Clarissa wastes her time "lunching, dining, giving these incessant parties of hers, talking nonsense, saying things she didn't mean, blunting the edge of her mind, losing her discrimination" (71). He bluntly judges Clarissa and her activities as frivolous, nonsensical, useless because they only reduce her to another shallow wife. Similarly to interminable, "incessant parties" remind us of their endless repetition and subsequent annoyance.

Woolf gives a voice to Peter's thoughts that explicitly demonstrate his disapproval for the gatherings. Richard shares Peter's opinion on Clarissa's parties partly, though Peter's comments becomes gradually more insulting. Richard Dalloway, the caring husband, is more concerned about her health and the negative impact hosting might have on her. It is not a necessity to him, which is why he casts it off as "foolish" and irresponsible. Their subjective perspectives are so narrow-minded that they do not take into consideration that Clarissa enjoys it.

> They thought, or Peter at any rate thought, that she enjoyed imposing herself; liked to have famous people about her; great names; was simply a snob in short. (…) Richard

> merely thought it foolish of her to like excitement when she knew it was bad for her heart. It was childish, he thought (108).

Adjectives such as frivolous, silly and trifling recur throughout Peter's discourse. Building on that, it does not seem like Peter has a high opinion of Clarissa. As her former lover, he does not even try to understand her interests and reasons for throwing parties. He projects his negativity on the other guests. By claiming she imposes herself, he implies that her guests also don't enjoy the parties. He accuses her of only intending to attract famous people of a higher social class to boost her good reputation. Peter's thoughts are increasingly condescending and he concludes by calling her a snob. Richard is seemingly concerned about her health, yet the adjectives foolish and childish patronise her and make her devoid of agency, as if she were not able to decide what is good for her by herself.[12] Rebecca Colesworthy argues that Mrs. Dalloway doesn't want to agree with them, albeit she has a hard time justifying the purpose of her parties: "Recalling both Peter's and her husband Richard's criticisms of her seemingly trivial gatherings, she resists conceding that they are meaningless, and yet waffles over what their meaning might be (175)". To Clarissa, hosting is a "gratuitous gift", though it is inextricably linked to social connections in exchange.

On multiple occasions, Woolf uses male characters to criticise the concept of sexual difference between men and women. One example is Peter Walsh, a firm believer in the concept of sexual and intellectual difference between the two sexes. Firstly, he mentions women's inability to feel passion. It is a difficult statement to make as he can only judge what he sees, he does not how women feel passion. As I will return to in the second part of the first chapter, Clarissa's love for Sally proves him wrong. He witnesses Clarissa's coldness towards him and thus

[12] Celine LeBoeuf argues that the socialisation of little girls is to blame for their supposedly childish behaviour even when they have matured: "little girls are allowed to behave in a childlike manner for a longer time, and this expresses the idea that they are destined to be more dependent on others than men are" (85)

deducts the lack of passion from her behaviour. Woolf voices common prejudices through Peter's generalisations: "But women, he thought, shutting his pocket-knife, do not know what passion is. They don't know the meaning of it to men. Clarissa was as cold as an icicle" (Woolf 72)[13]. She does not shy away from depicting the sexist opinion of Peter Walsh, as Jill Franks points out. Franks reminds the reader of the impact of class difference and their ensuing prejudices. Ultimately, Peter tries to escape being hurt by giving into stereotypes, one being that women are incapable of passion.[14] In addition, he criticises women's lack of understanding of love: "it is the most important thing in the world and no woman possibly understood it" (108). Peter repeatedly assumes a position of superiority to Clarissa and her parties, as well as women in general. He doesn't question the reasoning of his statements as he finds them justified by his own experiences. Clarissa's past lover paints a pejorative and insulting picture of women as a whole as a defense mechanism.

Although Mrs. Dalloway has presented the image of a heteronormative wife from the outside, her theory on the transcendence of gender and people prove that she does feel limited by the restrictions gender roles distribute to either men or women. At the sight of the ambulance rushing off with Septimus, Clarissa remembers a theory she had established in her youth, to cope with a feeling of dissatisfaction. Her dissatisfaction was caused by the fleeting nature of time and meeting people: "For how could they know each other? You met every day; then not for six months, or years" (Woolf 35). Clarissa and her contemporaries were suffering from these brief meetings, because they did not offer the chance to get to know people to their core. In his article "Beyond Gender: The Example of *Mrs Dalloway",* the scholar Michael Payne picked up on the notion of Clarissa feeling herself "everywhere": "She was all that. So that to

[13] In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf picks up on the stereotype that women should not display too much emotion: "Women are supposed to be very calm generally" (67). An overly sentimental reaction would be classified as "hysterical".
[14] See Jill Franks 118-119 for a more precise explanation

know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even places". Instead of being defined by her gender, class, or occupation, she believed in being defined by the impact she left on people and places.[15] Every person she had ever met carried a piece of her around, and she left traces of herself in the different locations she visited. That way, if one wanted the complete picture of her, one would have to seek out all people and places she had ever met or been to. It is a less confining theory and it creates an eclectic version of Clarissa, a version that cannot be summed up in one sentence.

Clarissa's transcendental theory consisted of the survival of the "unseen part of us, (…), the unseen might survive, be recovered, somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places, after death" (Woolf 135-136). The quote above is not only a consolation for Clarissa to know she will not be completely erased after her death. It also frees people from the bodily and materialistic restrictions that come with life. Shifting the importance from material to spiritual aligns with Virginia Woolf's advocation for "a transcendence of sexual roles, encouraging us to look beyond gender for an understanding of human life" (Payne 2). The strict categorisation into gender roles is not what life is truly about, according to Woolf; therefore she claims further that they should even transcend feminism, because that can be a limiting category as well.[16] The ever-lasting characteristics of humans are individual personalities, and the impact they left behind.

[15] Beauvoir also defended the claim of humans made up of their surroundings and their history : "The circumstances that characterize the body as a situation include the body's past and place in society" (LeBoeuf 86)

[16] Read more about the theory in Michael Payne's article "Beyond Gender: The Example of *Mrs Dalloway"*

1.2 How do Sally Seton and Lady Bruton challenge the norms established in the novel?

Young Clarissa's love for Sally Seton breaks up the picture of the perfect wife that Clarissa portrays throughout the novel. Sally is the person who made Clarissa realise that she sometimes experienced "what men felt" in a woman's company. In a moment of reflection, Clarissa admits that "she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, (…) she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt" (Woolf 30). Woolf continues to describe her taking pleasure in that thought and experiencing an orgasm, which she implies through the periphrasis "a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush". She remembers feeling ecstatic, going "cold with excitement" (32) when seeing her. Naturally, this shines a different light on the Clarissa characterised previously, as her desire for women challenges the heteronormativity of the 20th century. Her yielding to the charm of a woman makes her question the nature of her feelings for Sally as well as their relationship. Firstly, she elaborately describes her "extraordinary beauty" the effect of "abandonment" which captured her attention. The quality she refers to corresponds with Sally's daring side – young Sally Seton conveyed the impression of being able to say and do whatever she liked without taking into account any subsequent consequences. She was the easy-going and carefree reflection of Clarissa.

The influence of homoerotic love opened up different intellectual horizons for Clarissa. Just as Peter Walsh was previously concerned that Clarissa was "blunting the edge of her mind" by reducing herself to being a wife and hostess, Sally encouraged Clarissa to read philosophical texts. The latter saw Sally's personality as powerful, as a "gift". Rebecca Colesworthy quotes Simpson in her article on Mrs. Dalloway, who asserts that it is in private moments that Clarissa reminisces and fantasises about Sally: "the spirit of Sally's homoerotic gift re-emerges, circulates, and works to energise a libidinal economy that repeatedly threatens to irrupt

uncontrollably and to disturb dominant social, sexual and political structures" (179). Even the thought of Sally challenges the patriarchal structures of society, and it proves that Clarissa has the power to disrupt the society she adheres to if she would only succumb to her private fantasies. Though Clarissa conveys the image of a perfectly heterosexual hostess, rebellious tendencies linger within her.

Clarissa notices how different her feelings were for a woman. Her love felt more disinterested and selfless. She picks up on the "the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man" (Woolf 32). By opposing her love for a man to her love for Sally, she unconsciously develops a competitiveness. She highlights the genuine and pure feelings she had for Sally, hence I question whether her feelings for Richard felt less integral and authentic. The bond of women resembles a sisterhood, whereas there are always underlying contrasts in a heterosexual bond. She felt like being "in league together", always having someone by her side, which she does not say about Richard at any point of the novel. She claims that she was the happiest she had probably ever been when Sally kissed her that evening. She felt like she had been given an unmaterialistic present, "a diamond, something infinitely precious" (Woolf 33). Her manner of reminiscing about her youth cast doubt upon her also feeling this deeply and lovingly about Richard.

Furthermore, Sally Seton herself did not conform to the norms of a respectable young woman, which illuminates why Clarissa admired her. Sally was different, daring, she ran around the passage naked without inhibitions. Clarissa Dalloway confirms that Sally "shocked" people with her carefree attitude. She rebelled against society by smoking cigars and displaying "completely reckless" behaviour. To the eyes of a middle-aged man like Mrs. Dalloway's father she appeared uncouth: "She was untidy, Papa said" (32). His reaction would have been shared by most of society – they deemed her "untidy" and messy, solely because she did not conform

to the expectations of a laid-back woman of her age. Despite these negative observations of Sally, it was exactly the charm of her unconventionality which drew Clarissa to her.

To conclude my analysis of Sally Seton as a nonconformist woman, I wanted to draw attention to the abusive incident between Hugh and Sally, as it reinforces the helplessness of women without a man siding with them. The statement "Nobody believed a word against Hugh, of course. If it had been some honourable Edith or Lady Violet, perhaps; but not that ragamuffin Sally without a penny to her name" (Woolf 66) indicates how discriminatory the Dalloways' social network is. In this situation, everyone sides with Hugh Whitbread because he's a noble and well-respected man and husband of Evelyn. Sally's worn look, her "ragamuffin" reputation and the fact that she did not have the chance to grow up in a wealthy family makes her less believable. They don't believe her word because she is not seen as "honourable" and trustworthy enough to respect. It is reasonable to them that a man like Hugh wouldn't be interested in her, so they cannot believe that he kissed her without her consent.[17] By dismissing the abuse, even the wives follow their husbands' opinion, without questioning twice whether a fellow young woman had gone through a terrifying experience. Even in feminist interventions, rape has become an inevitable incident to happen in a woman life, as the man then reinforces the gender identity of the "feminine victim". In her essay "Fighting Bodies", scholar Laura Marcus advocates for speaking up about these gender-focussed crimes: "Feminists have also insisted on the importance of naming rape as violence and of collectively narrating stories of rape" (Rooney 90).

Aside from Sally Seton, Woolf introduces us to Lady Bruton and briefly to Miss Brush. Hugh Whitbread unflatteringly illuminates the less feminine appeal of Millicent Brush. He seems to

[17] This abuse of male power ties in with the essentialist concept that 'women were seen as "naturally subordinate to men"' as Nancy Armstrong underlines in her essay "What feminism did to novel studies" (Rooney 101-02). Men could get away with crimes like these because of their higher standing within society. Moreover, Sally's ragged appearance and low reputation made her an easy target.

condemn her for being “deficient (…) in every attribute of female charm” (Woolf 92), which indicates that men have also been indoctrinated by society to expect certain “feminine” characteristics of women. Although he praises her for being “capable of everlasting devotion, to her own sex in particular, being knobbed, scraped, angular, and entirely without feminine charm” (Woolf 95), his compliment is lessened by his description of her appearance. A man like Hugh is not attracted to a woman who puts no effort into her appearance, who looks battered and lacks female curves. The notion of “everlasting devotion” to women implies the possibility that she, like Mrs. Dalloway, feels attracted to her own sex rather than men. Lady Bruton and Milly Brush are both counterfigures to the ladylike and charming Clarissa Dalloway, since they do not possess what it takes to be considered a real “woman” in the early 20th century.

Lady Bruton has a similar attitude to men than they have to women – namely she generalises them and throws them all into the same gendered category. She does not see a point in distinguishing them from each other: “Anyhow, the difference between one man and another does not amount to much” (Woolf 93). She doesn’t believe that they have unique personalities or differing viewpoints, which echoes Peter Walsh’s critique of Clarissa and “women of her sort”. As women conform to the social rules of their class and gender, men tend to imitate each other as well. In contrast to Mrs. Dalloway whose sole purpose in life appears to be hosting, Lady Bruton admits that “Parties terrified [her]” (99). What is more, Lady Bruton’s reputation foreshadows her “talking like a man” because she partakes in political conversations Mrs. Dalloway admits she had no knowledge of. Through Lady Bruton, Woolf implies that sexual difference is even recurred to when it comes to personal interests: women should be interested in networking and shopping, men discuss the serious issues of the world.

Moreover, Richard Dalloway's respect and admiration for Lady Bruton elevates her from other women. As she is great-granddaughter or great-great-granddaughter of some General, that inevitably means something to Dalloway:

> She should have been a general of dragoons herself. And Richard would have served under her, cheerfully; he had the greatest respect for her; he cherished these romantic views about well-set-up old women of pedigree, and would have liked, in his good-humoured way, to bring some young hot-heads of his acquaintance to lunch with her; as if a type like hers could be bred of amiable tea-drinking enthusiasts (Woolf 94)

The chosen paragraph encapsulates what discerns Lady Bruton from the women of her class. She has male attributes which would make her a great leader, and Richard Dalloway would even "serve under her" although she is a woman. Nevertheless, it is probably the standing of the men in her family which add to that trust and respect. Richard has an immense admiration for the General, of who Lady Bruton descends, though his respect her might not exist were she of different ancestry. The emphasis on her "pedigree" stands out primarily because it confirms her social status. Albeit, since the word is also employed in the realm of dog-breeding, it stands out because it suggests an ambiguity. Why does Richard praise her ancestors, while indirectly comparing them to well-bred dogs? The following line reinforces that ambiguity; "a type like hers could be bred". Ultimately, Dalloway admires her dutiful ancestors, a "long line of military men, administrators, admirals" (99) and she is meant to carry out their legacy. From the eyes of society, Lady Bruton is expected to continue their cultural reputation and the respect they had gained. She reflects these men through her authoritarian and independent personality which could enable her to manage her own troops, according to Dalloway.

Lady Bruton's sexuality is interesting to pursue. As we have already established through Richard Dalloway's description of her, she talks "like a man" because she participates in

conversations on politics and history. Moreover, she displayed an unusual interest in "women who got in their husbands' ways, preventing them from accepting posts abroad" (Woolf 95). On the one hand, it could be a reflection of her criticism on women who cannot function without the presence of their husbands. On the other hand, which links her to her assistant Miss Brush, it indicates a sexual ambiguity – Lady Bruton possibly enjoys when the wives' husbands are abroad. It makes it easier for her to get close to them. Aside from her unclear sexual interests, it makes it hard for men to explain this sudden interest in them and to convince both parties that Lady Bruton is purely invested in their well-being. Is it truly "some female comradeship which went beneath masculine lunch parties" (95), like Miss Brush's devotion for women, or is it a suppressed desire she tries to satisfy through spending times with these wives? Therefore, a polite question such as "How's Clarissa?" becomes difficult to interpret, considering both of them are not close acquaintances. Clarissa has a hostile attitude towards Lady Bruton as she suspects her of having an affair with her husband. If Lady Bruton is in fact gay, her interest in Mrs. Dalloway only comes through when she can hide it behind a simple question she asks in a gathering of men.

Another key point is her judgemental personality. Her dismissive attitude is highlighted when she meets Peter Walsh in a public gathering after he had been away in India. Instead of being invested in what he has to report, she is obviously annoyed by him and his stories. She adopts a condescending tone and dismisses Peter's stories as unimportant, frivolous, and superfluous. It's ironic that Lady Bruton judges Peter as harshly as he judged Clarissa and her parties after his return. Lady Bruton clearly states that listening to Peter is a waste of time: "She was getting impatient; the whole of her being was setting positively, undeniably, domineeringly brushing aside all this unnecessary trifling (Peter Walsh and his affairs)" (Woolf 97). Her self-confidence is accentuated by the latter as well as her overpowering "domineering" personality. She doesn't

even care to sit politely through Peter's experiences, as Clarissa would probably feel obliged too.

In spite of her overpowering confidence and independence – we do not see her in the company of her husband – she cannot master everything on her own. Since she has to submit a letter to a paper, she calls on Hugh Whitbread and Mr. Dalloway to assist her. Her respectful status and her dominance render the task of "recruiting" these men to help much easier. Although Lady Bruton's writing style is chaotic and "tangled", which displays a weakness, she nevertheless bolsters her powerful hold on these men. As Richard Dalloway confirmed that he would serve her, he does so by improving the eligibility of her letter. Instead of having female servers, she subverts the power roles and employs men:

> Lady Bruton had often suspended judgement upon men in deference to the mysterious accord in which they, but no woman, stood to the laws of the universe; knew how to put things; knew what was said; so that if Richard advised her and Hugh wrote for her, she was sure of being somehow right.(Woolf 98)

She laments that men are somehow submissive to the "laws of the universe" which enable one to write legibly and concisely. She underlines that "no woman" is graced with that talent, hence attributing certain talents to genders. Men are a part of the intellectual sphere, whereas women take care of the household and children, a categorisation which supports the concept of sexual difference. Regardless, in this instant Hugh and Richard are submissive to her needs, and her ability to get people to do her "dirty work" is reiterated near the end of the novel: "She had her toadies, minor officials in Government offices who ran about putting through little jobs on her behalf" (Woolf 154). These men, or "toadies" ingratiate themselves by proving their servility to her, which she thanks them for by offering lunch. To show her gratitude to Hugh Whitbread, Lady Bruton steps out of character and does a "graceful thing". She calls him her "Prime

Minister" and stuffs his carnations into her dress. Her small gesture raises Hugh up on a pedestal, it gives him back the air of superiority he had laid off while working for her.

As Lady Bruton and Sally Seton are examples of moving away from heteronormativity and gender roles, they indicate the move towards unconventionality which I am going to analyse in *Orlando*. Sally Seton and Clarissa's homoerotic encounter as well as Lady Bruton's masculine attributes foreshadow the elements Woolf developed even deeper in Orlando, by shining a light on a protagonist who undergoes a sex change, before coming to terms with being an androgynous figure, rather than sticking to conventional norms of sexuality. Orlando truly challenges patriarchy by rejecting marriage

Chapter 2: Gender Transformation and Fluidity in *Orlando*

Virginia Woolf's most discussed novel *Orlando* is a subversive take on an autobiography. The narrator, or biographer, takes the reader on a journey of gender transformation spanning the Elizabethan age to the early 20th century, yet the focus is not restricted to gender. Through the narration, Orlando is primarily presented as a person, whose character traits are preserved no matter their biological sex. Here the distinction between sex and gender is important to highlight; sex is biologically determined by having either female or male organs, whereas gender is what one becomes based on the societal distribution of roles. Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir were both defenders of gender as a social construct. Beauvoir's phrase from *The Second Sex* "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" reinforces the aspect of "becoming" and growing into the gender role of either being a woman or a man that society has curated over centuries. This chapter primarily focusses on Orlando's behavioural patterns and the societal conventions evoked in the novel's first four chapters. As a male, Orlando was particularly focussed on youthful female beauty, he insisted that women must be perfectly clothed and well-scented. Nevertheless, he finds himself bored by English women imitating

the same monotonous style and manners, until he falls in love with the gender-defying Moscow princess.

Moving on from the characters in *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf fully embraced the androgyne in *Orlando*. Nevertheless, she showed Orlando's journey as a process, shifting from a young Orlando whose narrator kept reinforcing his masculinity, slicing off heads, to an Orlando who first abides by rules of femininity and then lives as if their gender did not matter at all. As I will argue, Orlando did have both masculine and feminine characteristics in them from the beginning of the biography, for instance his eyes "like drenched violets" seemed to be brimming with tears. After Orlando's sex change, it is the narrator who adamantly repeats that except for her gender, nothing has changed, and that it solely due to society's expectations that they have decided to shift her pronouns to she/her. The latter subject ties in with gender being a social construct, a categorisation society needs in order to know how to treat Orlando and which rules to apply to her. In the end, regardless of her biological sex, Orlando chooses a path not many do – she embraces a gender-fluid identity, modifying her sexuality as it feels right for her.

2.1 Orlando's ambivalent masculinity & view on women

The beginning of *Orlando* underlines his masculinity while simultaneously weakening it by indicating the need to state it. Orlando is introduced through his male gender: "He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it" (Woolf 1). It is noteworthy that the narrator feels the need to confirm that he is unquestionably a man. It seems as if Orlando's face has androgynous qualities, which, in addition to the power of contemporary fashion, could make it harder for an outside spectator to know at first sight whether Orlando is a young man or a woman. Therefore, there is a tension set up right from the preliminary page – an ambivalence in our protagonist's sexual nature. The assertive

statement about his sex stands in direct opposition to the end of the novel, when Orlando admits enjoying performing both genders.

In Butler's view, all queer gender performances emulate the gender roles praised in the heterosexual realm. These are often sexist because they are not truthful, they are a performance of a behaviour that has been marked as either feminine or masculine:

> The illusion of a stably sexed body, core gender identity, and (hetero) sexual orientation is perpetuated through repeated, stylized bodily performances that are performative in the sense that they are productive of the fiction of a stable identity, orientation, and sexed body as prior to the gendered behaviour (Butler 173 qtd in SE)

Butler's statement demonstrates that a body entirely consumed by performing its single sexuality is illusory. It can only be kept up by adhering to "stylized bodily performances" which are repeated daily. The notion of performance highlights the unnaturalness of it, the stable sexual identity is artificially produced rather than conveyed by the person's natural demeanour. Therefore, Orlando has chosen to grant their gender the ability to fluctuate after experiencing the restrictiveness both genders entail.

The legacy of Orlando's noble fathers who had proven their power primarily through fighting and "[striking] many heads of many colours off many shoulders" (Woolf 1) is omnipresent. There is no room for sentimentality, portrayed through his mother, only brutality and ruthlessness are praised. The young boy envied them and wanted to accompany them instead of caring for the garden with his mother. Karen Kaivola remarks that Orlando training with his sword "links him with a long line of imperial ancestors, underscoring his masculinity" (252). In other words, his ancestors define his masculinity, not his own actions as he is still too young to prove his force. Orlando is set up for success: "From deed to deed, from glory to glory, from office to office he must go, his scribe following after, till they reach whatever seat it may be

that is the height of their desire" (Woolf 2). As he follows into footsteps of greatness, he will easily acquire the status he desires. It is expected of him to become like his fathers, who represent masculine strength and hardness.

In contrast, other characteristics such as his clumsiness or the beauty of his "candid, sullen" face are symbolistic of his feminine side. The narrator begins by describing "the red of the cheeks was covered with peach down" and his discreet facial hair above his lips, which are rather small to expose his teeth of "an exquisite and almond whiteness" (Woolf 2). the perfection of his face is only carried further by his short nose and his ears attached closely to his head. The colour in his cheeks, his perfectly white teeth, his proportional nose and ears convey the portrait of a picture-perfect face. As seen in paintings of women in Elizabethan times, beauty standards included the blushing of women's cheeks and the teeth resembling pearls. So, although the narrator previously foregrounded Orlando's masculinity, especially by picking up on his ancestors, his face says otherwise. Ultimately, his eyes betray his female sentimentality: "He had eyes like drenched violets, so large that the water seemed to have brimmed in them and widened them" (Woolf 2). His eyes compared to flowers drenched by water, which symbolises tears, question the hard masculinity of Orlando. According to Hogan, the brimming tears stand for the stereotypical feminine sensibility (192)[18]. He sees his eyes as representative for his sexuality split half into female and half into male character traits. It implies that he is susceptible to influence by both genders. Thus, to be more like his fathers had to "steal away from his mother", escape her feminine influence to continue training his blade-wielding skills to live up to his ancestors' expectations.

A further feminine rather than masculine trait is Orlando's deep appreciation for nature since it enables him to tune into his sentimentality. He is sensitive to his surroundings, he admires the

[18] Karen Kaivola has also picked up on this description as questioning Orlando's masculinity (252)

sounds of nature, of the birds, of wood being chopped, which eventually inspire all kinds of emotions and a passion in him. Nature speaks to his sentimentality, which indicates that he is not purely made to become a fighter and a noble soldier. He is also a writer and a poet, whose imagination is fed by what he seeks out in nature: "sights exalted him – the birds and the trees; and made him in love with – the evening sky, the homing rooks; (…)" (Woolf 3). Orlando takes all these impressions in and he turns them into art. This emphasises his soft and attentive side in contrast to his male ancestors whose main ambition it was to defend their country and their dignity. It is worth noting that the narrator mentions that these natural elements make Orlando fall in love with death, an abstract and genderless entity. His sentimentality is further emphasised at the end of the first chapter. Even during his infatuation with Sasha he portrays the tendency to succumb to melancholy, for reasons uncertain to him and the reader: "Orlando would fall into one of his moods of melancholy" (Woolf 23). His happy moments seem to be over as quickly as they begin, and he concludes his gloomy mood by stating that everything eventually ends in death. Previously Orlando had looked upon death as a romantic partner, yet it rapidly deteriorates to a source of sadness.

The sexual aspect intrinsic to nature is indicated by the "amorous activity of a summer's evening" he feels around his body. Although Orlando is only 16 years old and playful, he yearns for someone who can speak to his heart. Nature gives him the opportunity to live out his vivid imagination – he imagines

> The back of a great horse that he was riding, or the deck of a tumbling ship – it was anything indeed, as long as it was hard, for he felt the need of something which he could attach his floating heart to; the heart that tugged at his side; the heart that seemed filled with spiced and amorous gales every evening about this time when he walked out. (Woolf 5)

He has the need to find someone to become settled, to attach his heart since it would keep floating around otherwise. His longing and desire is accentuated by the "spiced and amorous gales" which fill his heart every evening – here the narrator uses the synonym for tempestuous winds to communicate how strong his desire is to live out his ability to love. "Spiced" also adds that he is not purely looking for a platonic relationship, but that he has physical romantic needs as well.

His close connection to nature makes these extreme feelings possible, and it is a trait he does not lose even when he undergoes his sex transformation. Towards the latter end of the book, Orlando the woman declares "I am nature's bride" (Woolf 165), which highlights firstly that her personality has not changed by changing sex. Secondly, her desire to be the wife of a natural entity, that does not have a designated sex, links back to falling in love with death as a boy. I will return to the importance of being "nature's bride" in the second part of the chapter, yet here it already implies a wish to not be tied to specific gender and sexuality.[19] For instance, if Orlando is a woman, society expects her to marry a man, and as a young man, he has to choose between a myriad to female contenders.

Orlando's intolerance of older women is apparent in how he treats and especially thinks about the queen. Orlando's respect for this elderly woman fades quickly as he is confronted with her smell and her age. She is not the representation of what he longed for prior – he describes her body in the following manner: "a hand he guessed, attached to an old body that smelt like a cupboard in which furs are kept in camphor;(…) and held itself very upright though perhaps in pain from sciatica; and never flinched though strung together by a thousand fears; and the Queen's eyes were light yellow" (Woolf 7). The medicinal strong smell he is greeted with is

[19] Nevertheless, Orlando concludes that being married is what it takes to "pass its examination successfully", "it" represents society, then she would do so yet still stay true to herself: "She need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself" (Woolf 179). She yields to the spirit of her age (Derek 111).

revolting and unattractive. It reminds him of an old unaired cupboard. Even her efforts of covering herself in gemstones and gold accessories cannot draw him in. This passage is meaningful because it can be applied to society more generally. Even though Orlando is just a young boy disgusted by the Queen's appearance, the effort she puts into her appearance proves how important it is for women to still look well-clad, with a good posture, and jewels around her neck. Her façade is kept up so that people would not notice from an outside perspective that she is in pain, and anxious. Her eyes are the only indication of her decay – her beauty is fading with maturity, the yellow tone of her eyes does not conform with what society deems beautiful. Orlando is more terrified than envious of her.

A subversion of gazes occurs – it is not the male gaze that desires and objectifies the woman, but it is the elderly Queen, the female gaze, who judges Orlando's appearance. From his full head of dark curly hair downwards she deduces what she is longing to see. His innocence adds to the attraction since it positions the Queen higher than Orlando. Without even seeing them, the Queen fantasises about his legs, picking up on his violet-coloured eyes, his "heart of gold" and most importantly for her his "manly charm". She completely objectifies him when she scans his body from head to toes: "Eyes. Mouth, nose, breast, hips, hands – she ran them over; her lips twitched visibly as she looked; but when she saw his legs she laughed out loud. He was the very image of a nobleman" (Woolf 9). The Queen takes advantage of her power position, considering (and touching) every limb and facial feature of his. Her desire for him increases as her lips begin to twitch, crowned by Orlando's legs which she had already imagined beforehand. He is at her mercy as the object of her desire in human form. The qualities she praises in the young Orlando are equal to the ones she is steadily losing in old age. Thus, she highlights the ephemeral nature of beauty, especially tragic for women. If women do not conform to beauty standards, marriage opportunities shrink, and what does a woman become without a husband? The queen rejoices in Orlando's youthful beauty, he becomes her prized

possession whom she protects by not sending him to war as it would risk ruining his “tender flesh” (Woolf 9). That is unfortunate since the narrator’s introduction exhibited Orlando’s will to become like his fathers and fight battles. Instead, the Queen treats him like her possession and she uses her maturity and status to dominate him.

The ephemeral nature of female beauty is also a preoccupation for Orlando. He compares girls to roses, to underline the short timespan when they have reached their peak of beauty. he continues to employ the floral vocabulary when he evokes “plucking” girls. Similarly to how the Queen objectified Orlando, he elevates himself over the girls he must pluck in order to own them before their ripest moment comes. He asserts “plucked they must be before nightfall; for the day was brief and the day was all” (Woolf 11), a statement reminiscent of women’s biological clock running out. Here it is not the interest in childbearing, but rather to have sexual access to women as long as they look desirable and youthful. The flower metaphor is extended and implies that there is an abundance of choice for Orlando to pick from. Orlando has been longing for love and passion in nature each evening of his adolescence, therefore he is not as selective when it comes to young women: “For Orlando’s taste was broad; he was no lover of garden flowers only; the wild and the weeds even had always a fascination for him”(11). He even admires the “wild and the weeds”, a metaphor for women who might rebel against common expectations, such as Sasha. Moreover, the wild element of flowers is in a sense a response to his “spiced and amorous gales”.

Orlando’s actions counterpoint his “broad taste” – he is painfully selective and discriminatory in the choice of a potential wife. He manages to find faults in each of the potential wives that are presented to him at the court of King James, which displays the close examination he dedicates to choosing his future wife. For instance, something as small as the colour of Clorinda’s eyelashes or her fear of blood turn him away from her. His second contender Favilla is eliminated form his selection because she had hurt a dog. As he is fond of dogs, he cannot

accept that aggression, and in addition Orlando relies on folkloric belief to justify his choice: “Orlando, who was a passionate lover of animals, now noticed that her teeth were crooked, and the two front turned inward, which, he said, is a sure sign of a perverse and cruel disposition in women” (Woolf 14). He picks up on her teeth turning inward and concludes that they indicate that she has more cruelty and corrupt qualities to dismantle, which proves how Orlando is influenced by appearances, first impressions, and alleged external characteristics exposing psychological abnormalities. Teeth malformations do not correlate with someone’s personality, yet here it is in Orlando’s favour that Favilla is mean to animals as he can use the crookedness of her teeth to rule her out. Thirdly, Euphrosyne is disqualified last, on the grounds of having “a perfect set of teeth in the upper jaw, though those on the lower were slightly discoloured” (Woolf 15). Orlando inspects his future wives as if he were checking animals of good breed. He does not take the time to recognise either their characteristics or their inner values. Throughout the process the narrator describes Clorinda as a “sweet-mannered lady” and Euphrosyne who would have complimented the noble Orlando perfectly considering the attention she dedicated to her appearance, yet he somehow still did not deem them good enough.

It quickly becomes clear that it is not the perfect compatibility or manners which attract Orlando to a woman. In effect, Orlando is attracted by a person’s appearance and their impact on him, which explains his sudden infatuation with Sasha. Without knowing who she is, whether she is a man or a woman, he is mesmerised by this figure skating past him. Due to the skater’s dress, loose clothes of Russian fashion, he cannot ascertain the figure’s gender. The reference to clothes disguising someone’s biological sex circles back to the initial page of the novel, when the narrator states that Orlando is undoubtedly a man. Nevertheless, Orlando is not taken aback by this gender ambiguity, it becomes a secondary preoccupation. Hogan points out that Orlando’s infatuation with Sasha is partly due to “her boyishness, her gender non-

conformity" (194), that is exciting to him in itself. As he continues to describe the person, the matter of gender is less and less important: "But these details were obscured by the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from the whole person" (Woolf 17). Woolf underlines that Orlando is seduced by the person's aura and how they make him feel during their initial encounter rather than their biological sex. He is torn between imagining the figure to be a woman, comparing her to all the things he likes. However, he cannot believe that a woman could skate the way the figure does: "no woman could skate with such speed and vigour" (Woolf 18). His statement is symbolic of the restrictions imposed on women – women are not expected to excel in any type of sports or physical activities.

Sasha's unclear gender is an obstacle to Orlando after the initial fascination has worn off, because he cannot free himself of the imposition of heteronormativity. If the figure were to be of his own sex, it would mean he could not explore their connection any further because he categorically excludes being with a man. The quote: "Orlando was ready to tear his hair with vexation that the person was of his own sex, and thus all embraces were out of question" exhibits the young Orlando's strict adherence to heteronormative rules. Orlando will only later develop a more open-minded perspective on the construct of gender. He can finally gain some clarity by looking at her body more closely, asserting that Sasha's mouth and chest were too feminine to be a boy's. As the impossibility of a union had already dawned on him, he rejoices in seeing that she is a woman, which permits her to be with her. The frustration Orlando felt during the brief moment of uncertainty only exacerbated how harshly these heteronormative standards have been ingrained into his brain. The socialisation he received while growing up forbade him to be a with another boy, even though he was attracted to the skater at first sight, when he had not even considered their biological sex yet. García-Madrid suggests that "although Sasha's sex is not made clear through the clothes she is wearing, Orlando feels attraction towards the princess due to the seductiveness which issued from her" (108), which

aligns with my emphasis on Orlando's fascination with the person as a whole rather than categorised into a woman or a man.

In contrast to Orlando's other contenders and the Queen, Sasha is a refreshing personality who defies the monotony English women embody. Their attraction occurred naturally, whereas the others were imposed onto him to love, as the reasonable choices to complement a nobleman of his class. Orlando paints an unamiable picture of older women in particular, displaying the ageist tendencies of his behaviour. Up until meeting the Russian princess Sasha he has not known what women could be other than old and skinny, "red-cheeked trulls too many to mention. A puling nun. A hard-bitten cruel-mouthed adventuress. A nodding mass of lace and ceremony" (Woolf 19). So far the sole encounters Orlando has had were with either harlots or mature women. The infatuated man makes a damning commentary on the women of the Elizabethan period – he portrays them either as whining, bad-mouthed, or all blending in together due to their adherence to the fashion of the 16th century. He generalises women by calling them a "nodding mass of lace and ceremony" while adding an element of bored acquiescence and uptight tolerance of gender roles. His commentary is not only judgemental, but also condescending, since women did not have the choice to exceed the boundaries. It would mean ending up unmarried, yet that is not an issue Orlando is concerned with in his manhood newly awakened by Sasha.

Orlando's experiences with women at court are only echoed by Sasha who is appalled by the English women she has encountered, joining into Orlando's sexist commentary. She joins Orlando in his dislike of "prying old women" (Woolf 22) who discomfort Sasha by looking at her. Sasha is a symbol of how they once must have looked. On the one hand they admire her beauty, on the other hand they despise her. Sasha has inspired new feelings in Orlando he cannot express because his prior experiences with women had looked drastically different, the images he intends to compare her to "had gone as stale as the women who inspired them" (Woolf 24).

The adjective stale, usually employed in relation to food that has been stocked for too long, illustrates the stagnant qualities of English women. They are stuck in their "steady beam of an Englishwoman", unable to change their ways to enable the possibility of passionate endeavours.

No matter how hard Orlando tries to present himself as a lover of all kinds of women, especially the "wilder" non-conformist ones, to pick up the floral imagery, his selectiveness can no longer be hidden. The importance he attributes to standing and social class shine through when he considers if Sasha is in fact and princess and not simply "peasant born". He dissects her appearance and her motions to try to find out whether there was not "something rank in her, something coarse flavoured, something peasant born" in her (Woolf 28). The use of "rank" is particularly worth analysing here as its meaning is ambiguous. The adjective can either gesture towards something unpleasant and gross, or it can be employed to display social standing, or lavishness. Considering how the quote continues, the former meaning seems to be more adequate. Nevertheless, this ambiguity symbolises Orlando's vacillation between seeing her as a princess and as a daughter of simple landowners. Additionally, he begins to see something "coarse" and unrefined in her, which plays into her possibly coming from a peasant family. The addition of "flavoured" emphasises the instability of gender – it is a flavour once can adopt, a choice to take each day, disregarding sexual organs. Naturally, a man of Orlando's standing needs to pay attention to the social hierarchy, albeit one would have expected a more open-minded approach leaning on Orlando's characteristics I have analysed prior.

To conclude this first half of the second chapter, Orlando exhibits his complicity with the patriarchal structures Woolf condemns in *A Room of One's Own* and in the female journey of *Orlando*. Orlando is quick to comment on female bodies changing as they grow older, which is reminiscent of his analogy of flowers. Women need to be chosen, or plucked, in the peak of their youth – age does not only affect their beauty, but it also takes a toll on their bodies,

according to our protagonist. Orlando already predicts Sasha's change as soon as he nears the age of forty: he imagines her growing "unwieldy" and "lethargic", growing larger and sleepier, which contrasts heavily with the energetic energy both of them are currently in possession of. Although both men and women cannot escape aging, it is more of an issue for women as love relies on outside beauty to enable attraction. It is after marriage that this superficial quality of the relationship should be deepened into a more meaningful love of each partner's character and talents.

Ultimately, Orlando is not as different as the biographer announces him to be among the first introductory pages. Like most men, he carefully selects his future wife based on attributes such as external beauty, standing, and youth.[20] Although his yearning for passion and love as well as his melancholy distinguish him slightly from the broad mass of eligible men, his reaction to deception lines up with the stereotypical reaction of a man whose ego has been hurt. It is astounding how fast he switches from feeling completely enamoured with Sasha to insulting her as "faithless, mutable, fickle, he called her; devil, adulteress, deceiver"(Woolf 36). He condemns her by calling her deceiving, untrustworthy, flighty and unfaithful, whereas he is the one who is hypocritical is illustrated through this insult. Orlando was promised to Lady Margaret while he was already enjoying the company of Sasha, yet that does not emerge as a point of criticism or self-reflection worth acknowledging from his side of events. Woolf demonstrates the double standards men can get away with, without being trademarked as not trustworthy and ruthless.

[20] See Rooney (73): "In the exposure of such a masculinist 'narrative of femininity', stereotypes of woman and women appear as the effects of patriarchy, including, of course, of patriarchy's many stories"

2.2 Orlando and her continuous move towards androgyny

It is in Constantinople that Orlando's sex change takes place. After navigating life as a nobleman in England, Orlando moved to Constantinople where he is meant to be promoted from ambassador to Duke. His trance is comparable to the one he went through when he was rejected by his Russian lover, though it spans seven whole days and he receives visits from strange yet telling figures. The transformation happens while he is unconscious, it is completely out of his control. In his sleep, the Lady of Purity, the Lady of Chastity and the Lady of Modesty speak to him. They praise virtues such as virginity, self-restraint, abstinence from abounding emotions. At first it appears unusual for them to visit him, however since he is about to transform into a woman, they indoctrinate him with these virtues in preparation for his life as a woman. The sisters reveal that they have been excluded from society: "But men want us no longer; the women detest us!" (Woolf 87). This exclusion gestures towards a shift in society – men possibly seek other qualities in women, not the usual chaste and docile woman of the Elizabethan period. The indication that women hate them is even more telling since the ladies praising these qualities thus take part in restricting women and imposing rules on them. To break away from a contained life, women have to hate qualities like modesty, celibacy, and purity, otherwise they cannot fully develop themselves.[21] However, society has not progressed as far yet as we can see through Orlando's continued story as a woman.

When Orlando wakes up in a female body, the biographer clearly emphasises that her body is the only aspect of her to have changed. The narrator admits that it will change her future, as men and women live different lives and different career paths are expected of them. As a man,

[21] Straying away from these characteristics harbours dangers: "The "selfish" woman who pursued her own intellectual ambitions above her duty to others "not only risked nervous exhaustion and wasting diseases; she might also develop dangerously masculine physiological characteristics. Her breasts might shrivel, her menses become irregular or cease altogether. Sterility could ensue, facial hair might develop" (Carroll Smith Rosenberg qtd in Kaivola 246)

Orlando would have followed further into the footsteps of his ancestry, fought wars, and become successful, whereas Orlando the woman should prepare for marriage, bearing children and taking care of the household. The transition is also processed by the narrator through the change in pronouns from he/him to they/them and finally she/her. They sum up the transformation as follows: “But in every other aspect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same” (Woolf 88). Comparatively, the pronouns are only reiterated for “conventions’ sake” according to Ryan Derek (104). The biographer is free of judgement and believes in the identity of Orlando, the person that they are rather than their biological sex or gender they have assumed. Other opinions are mixed and favour incredulity: Orlando’s fellow citizens could not grasp the transformation, so they asserted that “such a change of sex is against nature”, because his contemporaries have never seen it happen. According to them, biological sex is unalterable. Thus, they aim to prove “(1) that Orlando had always been a woman, (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man” (Woolf 89). The scholar Ryan Derek continues: “the stability of the male/female binary is, for example, continuously challenged by the narrator/biographer’s reiteration that Orlando is only classified as male or female because this is what society – and language – expects” (103).

Orlando’s sex change is an uncommon thing to have happened to someone, yet their reaction exposes the need for humans to attribute a person to a specific gender, precisely by defining their biological sex. Very fittingly for her situation, she dressed in “those Turkish coats and trousers which can be worn indifferently by either sex” (89). Her attire emphasises this fluidity of gender, leaning towards the collaboration of both sexes defined as androgyny. The disguise through clothing reverts to the beginning, which the scholar García-Madrid highlights in his article: “Orlando wears clothing of ambiguous nature that veils his gender” (110). Veiling his

gender keeps up the mystery of which biological sex may lay underneath. Orlando's contemporaries expect Orlando to still be a male after his transformation, that he has only covered it up by adopting feminine traits.

Despite her sex change, Orlando has not grasped the extent of it. She plans to continue exercising her profession of ambassador, so she takes her pistol and sticks it into her belt, as of nothing had changed. As she leaves Constantinople, she proves her courage and her ability to defend herself when faced with challenges of life and nature. Since she then joins a gypsy tribe, she is not made aware of the new conventions that appear especially restricting to someone who was used to being a man for the past years. Among the "gypsies"/nomads, she is occupied with traditionally non-female tasks, if one considers them the point of view of English aristocracy. She is in charge of milking goats, one of the less "male" tasks, yet she also herds cattle, drinks out of a goat's skin. Finally, she even enjoys smoking pipes with the male leader of the tribe: "she begged for a puff from old Rustum's pipe, filled though it was with cow dung" (Woolf 91). Neither the action of smoking nor the smell her description evokes are particularly appealing or appropriate for a woman of her standing. She adds that the women from the tribe "differ very little from the gypsy men" (Woolf 99). Being socialised in such a liberal environment is freeing, although it does not prepare her for gender-binary beliefs of her home country.

However, Orlando will only learn about these new-found social conventions upon her return to England. Upon her departure, she admits that "it is a strange fact, but a true one, that up to this moment she had scarcely given her sex a thought" (Woolf 99). Her sex was not a topic of interest to the nomadic tribe she was living with[22], simply her hard work and company was

[22] On that subject, Rosen wrote that the nomads "represent a space outside of convention, whether that convention be marriage, heteronormative desire, the gendered muse/writer relationship, the depiction of nature as feminised, or the binary system of gender that Orlando explodes" (163)

enough. To be able to sit on deck of the Enamoured Lady though, she had to begin by putting effort into her appearance. First, she buys clothes “as women then wore”, “the dress of a young Englishwoman of rank” (Woolf 99). It has made her conscious of the importance of clothing in correlation with gender. Biological sex is primarily revealed by body shape and by the presence of either female or male genitalia. In contrast to sex, gender can be enacted/ manipulated precisely through the power of clothes. The example of Sasha, disguised by clothing that underlined her androgyny, as well as Orlando at the beginning of the novel, showcase how gender roles can be deceiving. Before coming to England, Orlando was a liberated person, unaware of which gender she had to represent. In chapter four she realises that clothes, other than the loose tunics she had been accustomed to, differentiate men from women.

Orlando’s gender reversal unmasks patriarchal power. It is a pivotal moment, for the first time in her life as a woman she is conscious of “the penalties and privileges of her position” (Woolf 99). The penalties she refers to stand for the gender restrictions imposed on her, which is a considerable change from the freedom she had benefitted from before. In “Blurring Reality and Blurring Gender”, García-Madrid poignantly sums up the shift Orlando is confronted with: “Gender does not impose any constraints on Orlando’s identity when it is disassociated from a broader societal context, particularly the urban and Western European society characteristic of the 19th and early 20th centuries” (111). He reinforces how her views on gender were different when she was living among the nomads because they did not give in to the heteronormative values inextricable from the Western world. If she had stayed with them, she would not have realised what it means to be a woman in England, to act like one, and how one is treated differently and judged by one’s attire.

The notion of chastity, as predicted by Lady of Chastity’s visit, comes to her accompanied by the overbearing desire to preserve it. Chastity is the pillar “the whole edifice of female government” is founded on. Women hoard it as if it were “their jewel, which they run mad to

protect, and die when ravished of" (Woolf 99). These first confrontations with the female gender role are overwhelming for Orlando. When Orlando was a man, he too had insisted that "women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled" (Woolf 101), without knowing how much effort is put into keeping up this chastity and an all-round good reputation. Although the virtuous sisters previously lamented their exclusion from society, their influence is still palpable. Above all, this focus on chastity drastically opposes the male experiences encounters Orlando had had with women. He had slept with multiple women, without even thinking about it twice, a privilege only granted to men. Ultimately, the pressure of being chaste reaches its peak when Orlando sees the cliffs of England. She suddenly feels "dishonoured; unchaste" (105), and not appropriate enough for an English woman of higher social standing. This pressure is the extent of society's harrowing conditions imposed on women, rules which make them doubt themselves and their adequacy.

The first interactions with the men working aboard the ship highlight the privileges of her gender and social position. Initially, Orlando takes some time to get used to the female fashion, as they are neither practical nor very comfortable. She calls the life of a woman "a pleasant, lazy way of life" (Woolf 100) and she appreciates how flattering her new attire is. Nevertheless, Orlando used to be a dependent and agile woman while she was living with the nomadic tribe, and that character trait has been taken away from her. Her clothing and her manners impede her to swim in case she fell off the ship. She concludes that from this point onwards she has to rely on men to save her: "Therefore, I should have to trust to the protection of a blue-jacket. Do I object to that? Now do I?'" (Woolf 101). A woman's reliance on a male saviour perfectly plays into the narrative of the damsel in distress in need of a strong man to retrieve her from trouble. The choice of female attire imposes this helplessness. The doubled self-interrogation proves that Orlando has not fully grasped her female habits yet. She even looks forward to falling overboard purely to feel the pleasure of being rescued. Although Orlando likes these

newly discovered advantages, and the food the sailors offer her, she has lost her independence and her liberty to do as she pleases. She has no other choice anymore than to rely on men and to agree with everything they say: “Must I then begin to respect the opinion of the other sex, however monstrous I think it?”. The ship is a microcosm of the English society, so she learns quickly that to be a woman is “to resist and to yield; to yield and to resist” (Woolf 101) to the favours of men. Resisting is symbolic for chastity and modesty, whereas yielding is just as important to give her partner/ the man in question a sense of superiority. A gloom settles on Orlando as she realises that speaking her mind, saving herself, and ignoring the opinions of men will be replaced by female passivity.

From a male perspective, the belief that women should be “obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled” is a given, which Orlando was not aware of before. Orlando’s sex change symbolises everything she had taken for granted, therefore her conclusion is all the more sobering. She realises she can only be chaste, well-dressed and perfumed if she commits to abstinence. Although Orlando has been in the body of a woman for a short amount of time, through Orlando’s voice, Woolf rightly points out the restrictions of her sex. The aspects of femininity men praise are not natural – “They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life” (Woolf 101). It does not suffice to abstain from enjoying life, Orlando acknowledges. Women also have to look out for the other sex by covering their ankles, lest a man with a family to support might feel provoked by them. Orlando mocks the impact certain body parts have on men, such as bare ankles, when she compares naked ankles to death for the male who sees them. This analogy is hyperbolic, considering that it’s only a woman’s ankles that are borne, not any intimate body parts. Nevertheless, the hyperbole is needed to illustrate the strictness of regulations women must adhere to in English society. Women are asked to hide their beauty and abstain from the delights in life to protect men: “all a woman’s beauty has to be kept covered lest a sailor may fall from a masthead” (Woolf 102).

It is ironic since in all other aspects of life, such as when a woman goes overboard, she ineluctably depends on a sailor saving her from death.[23] These conventions shock Orlando, but if she had grown up a girl, her female caregivers would have enshrined these responsibilities in her education in early childhood.

Through Orlando's voice, Virginia Woolf criticises that women are deliberately kept dumb by men because they are not given the same right to education as men are which she explored in detail in *A Room of One's Own*. Her transformation is unfortunate in that sense because she has the ability to draw comparisons to her life as a man and it reinforces what she is lacking as a woman. Simultaneously, it highlights women suffering under the patriarchy. The power she was trusted with as an ambassador in Constantinople have been taken away from her, drawing her sword or sentencing a man to death are no longer tasks for a woman, which reinforces the idea of sexual difference. Men are authoritarian, they are granted the power to decide over others' fates, whereas women are restricted to keeping up an elegant appearance as well as the household. Orlando has been reduced to a servant, pouring out tea for men and keeping up their happiness, instead of participating in the discussion rounds between the poets and writers she admires. Her own poetic tendency is undermined, she is not allowed to express her creativity. Orlando laments "what fools they make us – what fools we are!", mourning her lack of power and submissiveness to men. She develops a low opinion of the other sex, a sort of resentment, since she understands that women are deliberately kept "inferior" for fear that, to quote Woolf's feminist essay "anything may happen when womanhood has ceased to be a protected occupation" (38).

[23] Orlando's realisation of women's privileges and restrictions demonstrate that they are imposed by men, they nurture the element of performance of gender. Susan Okin remarks: "virtually all of the allegedly significant and 'natural' differences between the sexes result from the different rights and privileges that accrue to each, to the different behavioral expectations of each, the different ways they are addressed and treated and, often, to their different modes of dress" (Hogan 191).

In spite of belonging to the female gender, Orlando talks as if she identified with neither. The biographer picks up on a "vacillation" in her behaviour, especially because Orlando has the unique experience to have lived as a man and to live as a woman in England. Her sex change has gifted her an opportunity to have insights into both genders – she remembers her views on women in the 16th century Elizabethan England, as an ambassador in Constantinople, in addition to her new experiences as a woman in England. Owing to the latter, she does have a removed stance from both genders: "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" (Woolf 103). Orlando does not identify with one sex more than the other, because she knows that both have their advantages and their disadvantages. In her chapter "Vacillation and Mixture", Jody R. Rosen has established that Orlando is "multiply gendered", fluidly moving from one to the other which undermines the model of the "naturally" determined sex (153).

Vacillating between the two genders is reminiscent of a fluid gender identity. Orlando might possess organs proving her female sex, but her change did not take away her memories from manhood. Moreover, she deduces that both genders are "alternately full of the most deplorable infirmities" (103), and she lays emphasis on her uncertainty to which she wants to or must belong. Karen Kaivola defines Orlando as a "vision of identity that transcends the physical sex of the body" by both responding to and eluding "gender imperatives and sexual codes that shape Western culture from the Renaissance to the early years of the twentieth century" (235). The novel responds to these imperatives through questioning them, while simultaneously presenting the figure of Orlando as someone who has succeeded in staying genderfluid. Thus, life in the nomadic tribe was simpler, it did not matter what one's sex was. Orlando did not even consider her own while living with them far removed from the Western binary system.

Considering Woolf's contemporary time, the concept of genderfluidity is very advanced and it anticipates the changes within gender studies modern readers witness.

In opposition to Orlando's mindset on who he could love at the beginning of the novel, the changed Orlando has shifted her opinion on sexuality: "though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved". Her infatuation with Sasha has not faded, it has also grown more intense, a development Orlando attributes to her new sex. Her female consciousness has had the effect "to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had had as a man" (Woolf 104). Orlando has reached a depth of feeling she has never been able to feel as a man, which is reminiscent of Mrs. Dalloway and Sally Seton's love story analysed in the previous chapter. It underlines the sensitivity of loving strongly privy to women. In comparison to Orlando's first meeting with Sasha, when he feared the impossibility of being with her since her gender was unclear to determine, her perspective has changed to a more fluid understanding of love. Seeing herself as removed from the binary gender framework, she considers the person she loves and the emotions they unleash in her rather than whether they are a biologically a man or a woman.

Not only are women differentiated from men by their attire, but also by their emotions. Thus, Orlando learns that it is almost expected of women to cry in public or openly express their emotions. When she feels the impulse to do so, her initial reaction is that of a man – "to suppress such a putatively feminine expression of emotion" (Hogan 197). Men are supposed to be the tough backhand of women, they must protect them and therefore they cannot show signs of weakness, including tears. Orlando is different to other women because she knows, from personal experience, that although it is frowned upon, men cry "as frequently and as unreasonably as women" (Woolf 118). This statement points out that men are not intrinsically different to women, therefore distancing Woolf from essentialist feminism. The concept of sexual difference, tough versus emotional, is defeated in that point since it is not true, as exposed by Orlando. Regarding Orlando's statement revealing the sentimentality of men,

Patrick Colm Hogan adds “the sentence denies any fundamental difference between men and women in spontaneous emotion and, what is more, in spontaneous emotion expression” (196). Moreover, Orlando’s male experience proves that men cry just as much as women, yet they have been educated to suppress their tears. Being a man does not take away the power of emotions’ hold over a person. However, women are expected to display shock when they witness a man crying, which is another aspect to add to Orlando’s list of newly instated conventions. Hogan underlines how the shock expressed at male display of emotion has converted them to giving in solely when they are alone: “recognizing the disapprobation provoked by tears, men regulate their emotion expression in public, (…), only to succumb when alone” (196).

Expectedly, Orlando grows into her womanhood as time goes on, reducing her independent and self-defending tendencies. She adapts to the image women are meant to portray: “She was becoming a little more modest, as women are, of her brains, and a little more vain, as women are, of her person” (Woolf 122). The narrator adds the diminutive “little” to the adjectives to demonstrate that, although she has changed, she has only done so minutely. She has not completely numbed herself down for the sake of the patriarchy. The idea that women must be more modest and vain ties into the criticism Virginia Woolf voiced in *A Room of One’s Own*, specifically that women are deliberately excluded from education for fear they might become overbearing and more intelligent than men. A woman is not expected to defend her own personality and intelligence, she is meant to be the “looking glass” (33) which caters to enlarging the male ego.

The portraits of men and women illuminate the extent of the difference between the sexes: “The man has his hand free to seize his sword, the woman must use hers to keep the satins from slipping from her shoulders” (Woolf 123). Keeping in mind that the portraits are still images of the man and the woman, the painter made sure to characterise each gender concisely. The

man's hand is free to use, which designates a readiness for action. The woman, on the other hand, is distracted by readjusting her dress, which attributes her to the superficial world of appearances.[24] The woman is not expected to defend herself, she is at the mercy of the man who can handle a sword. The quote continues by defining the man's look, he challenges the world by straight ahead at a world which has been "made for his uses and fashioned to his liking". The man exudes confidence and power, whereas the female poser only glances at the world sideways, her eyes betraying her discreet and coy attitude. Furthermore, her eyes cast a suspicious look – she does not feel entirely safe in this world made for men, so she remains doubtful and careful. The question persists whether their outlook could be the same if they did not adhere to the gender roles they have grown into in childhood.

The power of clothing has been a leitmotif throughout the whole novel because it is supposed to define a person's gender at first glance. Although Orlando has taken refuge in gender-neutral clothing beforehand, she asserts that "clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath" (Woolf 123). Here, the text relies on sexual difference and the fundamental difference that exists between the two sexes, no matter the clothes they wear. The argument at hand claims that if a biologically determined man wore female attire, his nature would still betray his actual sex. Contrary to popular philosophical beliefs, who argue that clothes impact a person's view of the world and vice versa, Orlando's clothing change is rooted in a deeper transformation within herself. Butler argues that sex should not be "understood as the bodily indication that concealed within it is the essence of either a woman or a man". Bodies can seem to represent one gender, although it does not essentially correspond to their sex (SEP 5.1). At first read, it appears to be the change of becoming a woman, yet considering Orlando's tendency towards androgynous and gender-fluid clothing, it is not as simple.

[24] This complies with Susan Okin's statement that "different modes of dress" influence expectations and how women are treated (Hogan 191).

Throughout Orlando's female journey, I have witnessed a tension, or a dilemma, which has dominated her mindset regarding the binary system of gender. The term vacillation becomes increasingly important in the text because it encapsulates Orlando's position: she feels that she carries both genders within her, which even contributes to her impression of being distinct from both at times. The novel focusses on the "intermixture" of sexes:

> "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 the very opposite of what is above" (Woolf 124).

The above-mentioned quote classifies a vacillation from one sex to the other as "normal", something that every person experiences. Nevertheless, this shift is not portrayed to the outside world because the clothing keep up either a male or a female identity. The authentic self is hidden beneath due to a desire to keep up the façade, because that is precisely what clothes are. Clothes curate an identity acceptable to society, one that can be easily classified as either female or male. In other words, dressing in either a feminine or masculine way plays into the construction of gender – if a biologically female person wanted to deceive people by enacting a man's attire, she would simply need to dress in the clothing men wear and potentially adapt her hair to resemble that of a man. Clothing thus strongly influences one's external gender identity. Where organs define the biological sex of a person, clothing can determine the gender, since both do not always correlate. In Orlando's case, the scholar Ryan Derek quotes *A Room Of One's Own* to pick up on the possibility that a mixture of both sexes, an androgynous gender, could be the key to fulfilment in life and art as well. Woolf questions "whether they [the two sexes] also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness. (…) It is when the fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilised and uses all its faculties" (ROO 97). Woolf and Orlando emphasise that both genders have their advantages and disadvantages, so if both were to mingle they would create a complimentary whole. The intermingling of both

sexes is defined as androgyny, which Derek claims is "valuable in its destabilising of binary constructions of identity" (59). The notion of androgyny is particularly adequate for Orlando because it enables her to settle without having to choose which gender role they want enact for the rest of their lives.

It is ultimately the androgyny of Orlando which contributed to the eponymous novel's subversiveness and innovation. A poignant moment in the novel is the narrator's assertion that Orlando had found enjoyment in shifting her gender, they[25] had accepted their fluid sexuality and gender, unrestricted by society's conventions. They "enjoyed the love of both sexes equally" (Woolf 146), after which, as Karen Kaivola points out, "the reader is invited to picture her 'spending her morning in a China robe of ambiguous gender'" (248). The image of her robe eroticises rather than demonises her "transgressive" desires. In addition, it signals a returning to the roots or Orlando's identity, since as a young boy and while living as a nomad they had enjoyed wearing gender-neutral clothing. Considering that Orlando was published in the 1920s, Virginia Woolf was progressive in thematising androgyny and the breaking of societal gender norms. The novel also defies the arguments of critics claiming that Woolf was leaning toward conservative feminism, after proclaiming the aim of feminism "dead" because women's rigjht to work had been achieved. Nevertheless, Woolf always stressed the seeming difference separating the two sexes: "Again, the nerves that feed the brain would seem to differ in men and women" (Woolf 76).

Conclusion

Even if at first read Mrs Dalloway appears to be the quintessential wife and hostess, Virginia Woolf introduces topics such as homosexuality and androgyny through Clarissa's relationship

[25] After Orlando's journey from man to woman, and ultimately to gender fluidity, I have chosen to address Orlando with the pronouns they/them, to emphasise their androgyny

with Sally Seton, Lady Bruton's ambiguous sexuality, and Clarissa's transcendental theory. The belief that the "unseen part" of people, namely memories and effects they leave behind, emphasises Clarissa's desire to be seen as a fluid entity. She longs to be remembered after her death, that it is not her concretely as a woman who lives on; she aims to live on through the recollections people and places have of her.

Clarissa's transcendental theory is closely related to Orlando's perception of gender. Both embrace a fluidity: Clarissa sees a person as the sum of their memories and impressions, whereas Orlando sees Sasha first and foremost as a person who Orlando the man is subsequently enamoured by. Orlando matures throughout the eponymous novel, and at the end she realises that "though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved" (Woolf 104). Homoerotic love has showed both Orlando and Clarissa that it deepened their feelings for Sasha and Sally. Furthermore, the effect of clothing on gender in *Orlando* is a crucial element because it either reinforces the conventions of feminine and masculine clothing, or it is used by Orlando to cover up the shape of their body and beware uncertainty. It points to the possibility that Woolf was engaging in the same vacillation that Orlando took refuge in.

Ultimately, Virginia Woolf criticised the social construction that is gender. The scholar Jody R. Rosen quoted Anne Fausto-Sterling's poignant conclusion that "sex and nature are thought to be real, while gender and culture are seen as constructed" (157), which is applicable to both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*. Mrs. Dalloway carefully curates the image of her and her husband, it involves thought rather than happening spontaneously. In contrast to the regulated society Clarissa lives in, Orlando's time with the nomads is removed from all Western society, therefore Orlando is not confronted with stereotypes and the rules of femininity until they reach England. What is more, Orlando's opinion of women changes drastically during the sex change: he previously thought women were naturally well-scented and put together, so it was a standard

he judged them by. As a woman and later as a non-binary person, Orlando is able to lay off these confining expectations.

In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, Ellen Rooney asserted that femininity is an "ideology, that is, as a structure that we inhabit, one that we can study and thus critique, one that feminists desire to remake" (74). Woolf used the voices of Clarissa, Peter, Richard, and Orlando to criticise the norms that restrict women and to create a more fluid representation of women. Orlando themselves states that "Under our tweed and silk is nothing but a monotony of pink nakedness", thus reinforcing that all genders have the same starting points if they take of their clothes (Rosen 159). In hindsight, Virginia Woolf advocates for androgyny, for the two sexes to collaborate to build a whole, rather than being caught up in strictly separating the female from the male sphere. Through the evolution from *Mrs. Dalloway* to *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf moves away from the rigid image of femininity Clarissa Dalloway and the English society represent, to a more liberal and satisfactory life captured by Orlando who live regardless of what their biological sex's gender performance should consist of.

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