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Beyond Androgyny: Woolf's Play with Performativity, Gender, and Sex

Katherine Marielle Kuhn
Bard College

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by

Katherine Kuhn

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Introduction

> *It is fatal for any one who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly...* (A Room of One's Own, 104).

> *Whatever else one may say about androgyny, it represents an escape from confrontation with femaleness or maleness* (Showalter, 289).

In her *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), a book tracing the rise of a "feminine" literary tradition and identity, critic Elaine Showalter accuses Virginia Woolf of misleadingly advocating a faux-feminism which avoids actual engagement with problems of devalued femininity and misogyny in the literary sphere. While Showalter overtly alludes to Woolf's call for the creation of a female literary canon by naming her project after Woolf's polemical *A Room of One's Own*, her chapter dedicated to Woolf, entitled "Virginia Woolf and the Flight Into Androgyny," scathingly critiques Woolf's writing as a non-political feminist failure. According to Showalter, Woolf's literary effort to champion androgyny reflects her personal suffering as rooted in a frustration with her own womanliness: "Woolf's illnesses had always had some source in female experience; they had taken the classic female forms of frigidity, depression, and suicide attempts." Based on this vague and dubiously grounded generalization, Showalter posits that "the quest for androgyny was Woolf's solution to her existential drama," and warns that as readers, "we should not confuse flight with liberation" (280). Woolf's androgynous model of sex, in Showalter's account, is counterproductive to feminist purposes. Woolf's "feminized" emotional state (one which Showalter describes as akin to typical female "hysteria," using the term "female depression") is connected with a subconscious unwillingness honestly to represent a femininity that haunts her.

Showalter focuses specifically on Woolf's illustration of the "androgynous mind" in *A Room of One's Own,* in a now famous passage that undermines her feminist argument for the

recognition of women's writing as something necessarily unique, differing from men's writing in that is created from within a different set of socioeconomic circumstances. Indeed, critical attention to this aspect of the piece is both warranted and to be expected, for it appears to create an irreconcilable contradiction within Woolf's feminist vision. It is undeniably difficult to make sense of a book about "women's writing" in which Woolf first celebrates an essential difference between men's literature and that produced by women, only to finish with the image of a man and a woman entering into a taxi cab together, symbolizing a single successful literary brain that manages to be at once both male and female. Woolf begins by appearing to advocate the former view, stating that it should "be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men," asking, "[o]ught not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similartities?"(*A Room 88*). Not ten pages later, however, Woolf goes on to disavow sexual difference in writing, claiming that, within the individual, the sexes must come together in a "natural fusion," and explaining that the "there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body...[t]he normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating...Coelridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous" (98).

It is plain to see why critics such as Showalter may find fault with Woolf's presentation of these seemingly divergent views within mere pages of one another, deeming it a mistake, or, in Showalter's words, a "retreat" or "flight" from sexual difference. Showalter takes it upon herself to offer a psychoanalytic reading of Woolf's shortcomings, stating that for Woolf, "androgyny is another form of repression, or at best, self-discipline. It is not so much that she recommends androgyny as that she warns against feminist engagement" (Showalter 288). With this statement, Showalter somewhat brutally rips agency from Woolf, asserting that Woolf,

although verging upon writing "truly" about femininity, was ultimately undermined by her own personal trauma, rushing to the comfort of androgyny in a sort of feminist false-consciousness, fooling herself into believing that she had found some way to provide a voice for women while attempting to escape the constraints of an unbearable womanhood. Showalter summarizes her critique by describing Woolf's androgyny as "a response to the dilemma of a woman writer embarrassed and alarmed by feelings too hot to handle without risking real rejection by her family, her audience, and her class" (286). Showalter's analysis is not only condescending and presumptuous to a fault, but, disappointingly and despite her ground-breaking work that uncovers the sexism embedded within the discourse surrounding hysteria, seems to rest on a set of assumptions approaching misogyny about the intellectual incapacity of women.[1] Showalter unwittingly paints Woolf as a woman writer whose internalized and repressed waves of intensely "female" emotion and anxiety got the best of her. Interestingly, Woolf tackled these same types of stereotypes about women writers throughout her career, parodying the popular notion that women are innately incapable of objective intellectual thought in her books and multiple essays about women and writing.

A Room of One's Own is not Woolf's only novel vulnerable to scrutiny and confusion regarding feminist identity and androgyny. Orlando, too, arouses confusion about how far Woolf's feminism extends and what shape it takes, as the main character's fluid sex, gender, and sexuality can be interpreted as fulfilling a similarly unrealistic desire to, as Showalter suggests, "transcend" sexual categories while avoiding *real* feminist problems. "The androgynous mind," Showalter writes, "is, finally, a utopian projection of the ideal artist...unimpeded by consciousness of sex. Woolf meant it to be a luminous and fulfilling idea; but, like other utopian projections, her vision is inhuman" (289). Showalter here discredits Woolf's writings on gender

[1] See: *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (1985)

and androgyny as "inhuman" or "utopian," ineffective and evasive. Pointing to "whimsy" as a definitive feature of both *Orlando (1928)* and *A Room of One's Own (1929)*, Showalter argues that an experimental playfulness of tone or subject matter is related to an inherent inability to discuss or represent "serious" issues with regard to sex. Showalter describes this perceived ineffectiveness of Woolf's more exuberant pieces, stating that "[t]he techniques of *Room* are like those of Woolf's fiction, particularly *Orlando*, which she was writing at the same time: repetition, exaggeration, parody, whimsy, and multiple viewpoint," continuing to belittle *Orlando* as "tedious high camp," representative of an "ambivalent solution to the conflict of wishing to describe female experience at the same time that her life presented paralyzing obstacles to self-expression" (282, 291).

It is at the end of a long critical tradition of confusion and questioning that I arrive at my study of Woolf's various models of sex and gender. Even those critics who accept Woolf's playful prose as capable of offering something more than "tedious high camp" often still find themselves navigating the differences between conflicting representations of sex, gender, and androgyny in these pieces, attempting to come to some semblance of a solution and glean a coherent model of sex and androgyny from Woolf's fiction.[2] Marilyn Farwell's 1975 essay "Virginia Woolf and Androgyny," an early feminist reading, perhaps best exemplifies the apparent impossibility of assembling any one coherent critical theory of androgyny in Woolf's work, as Farwell discusses not merely distinction between different sexes in the text, but also distinctions between differing models of androgyny that Woolf seems to employ at different times. Farwell cites instances in which androgyny appears either as a "balance of male and

[2] These debates have persisted throughout multiple generations of feminist criticsm; Karen Kaivola, for example, traces different forms of androgyny (either "idealized androgyny" or "racialized or sexualized identity") throughout *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* in 1999. In 2010, Brenda Helt frames her study of androgyny in Woolf's work as one which disentangles desire from sexual identity, presenting a narrative of bisexuality. Both authors engage Nancy Bazin's *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision (1973).*

female principles," or, conversely, a fusion in which "androgyny is a union, usually mystical," that "would be identified with one supposedly asexual evaluative quality," eventually making a case that this idea of androgyny as "fusion" is more prevalent in Woolf's writing than the opposite model, while acknowledging a sort of failure in Woolf's decision not to suggest a singular, steadfast model of androgyny (435).

My inspiration for this project is grounded in a similar curiosity about the sorts of tensions arising from Woolf's fictional depictions of sex and androgyny. I am intrigued by the fact that critics seem so often to be uncomfortable with Woolf's choice to engage with different models of androgyny that do not conform to a singular, all-encompassing explanation of sex and gender. Feminist readers often attempt to make excuses for some theoretical "failure" marked by an inconsistency in Woolf's writing about sex. My approach marks a decided departure from the term "androgyny;" although it is not my focus, it does point to a misapprehension in readings of Woolf that I would like to address and complicate by looking beyond "androgyny." I am struck by a keen sense that no one gives Woolf authorial credit for understanding what she writes when it comes to androgyny. Early on, I began to suspect that there must be another angle from which her apparently "problematic" writings on sex and gender could be viewed as meaningful and fruitful rather than discredited as accidental or somehow detracting from the integrity of her work. Moreover, I think that trying to reconcile or explain perceived gaps in Woolf's sexual logic (a task which I admittedly was at first tempted to try) risks losing sight of the nuances embedded within moments in which Woolf engages with a variety of ideas about androgyny or other types of gender play, and ignores the fact that Woolf could be making a statement about sexual identity precisely by refusing strictly to adhere to any singular and easily recognizable model of either

sex or androgyny. In other words, perhaps, when it comes to sex, fluidity and incoherence is actually Woolf's point rather than a part of the problem.

Once I allowed myself to embrace the heterogeneity in Woolf's depictions of sex, I began to notice certain patterns amongst seemingly diverse or even contradictory instances of gender play in Woolf's writing which might have otherwise been overshadowed by a drive to erase or obscure these differences. It has become very apparent to me that many of Woolf's fictional portrayals of sex and gender identity share a common performative element in which, in order to "become" or "do" a sexual identity, individuals must adopt and internalize socially mandated traits or behaviors. To my mind, these patterns speak directly to gender theorist Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity. Putting Woolf's minor works, such as her early short stories and *Orlando*, in direct conversation with some of Butler's most influential texts, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter,* creates a space for Woolf's texts to speak with a new voice about sex, gender, and androgyny. Noticing how invested Butler is in the disruptive power of gender parody, drag, and the possibilities of sexual fantasy, it also became evident to me that, contrary to Showalter's frustration with Woolf's attraction to "camp," it is important to think seriously about texts in which Woolf employs playfulness and "whimsy" in depicting sex. Placing Butler and Woolf in dialogue, it became clear that these exuberant, sometimes blatantly ironic or parodic pieces of Woolf's work denaturalize sexual categories and shed light on sex and gender identity as above all performative processes. In my project, I will read Woolf's exploration of both internal and external manifestations of a socially regulating power as subject to repetition and adaptation over time.

Because it is my goal to explore the performative value of Woolf's most "whimsical" works, I chose to focus on *Orlando* as well as two of Woolf's short stories entitled "Phyllis and

Rosamond" and "A Society," narratives that, although critically almost obsolete, are deeply invested in the types of queering gender play and depictions of performativity that Butler makes visible or thinkable. As for Butler, I selected to work primarily with her most renowned texts *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* because they explicitly address aspects of sex and gender performativity that I find most prominent in Woolf's pieces. In my first chapter, I take Woolf's short stories as my primary material, using Butler's ideas of parody, drag, and satire to suggest possible avenues of transgressive interpretation, while, in my second chapter, I utilize Butler's ideas about physical sex and the material body as framework to navigate the confusing trajectory of sexuality and sex identity in *Orlando.* In animating this discussion between a contemporary theorist like Butler and Woolf, I have come to appreciate how Woolf's writing still speaks to our own theoretically sophisticated notions of gender, identity, and feminism.

Chapter 1: Are You Solid All the Way Through?

Introduction

> *If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a* ***true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction*** *(Butler, Gender Trouble 141).*

"Are you solid all the way through?" asks one character of another In Virginia Woolf's short story "Phyllis and Rosamond" (27). Is any core self buried beneath the layers of costuming and ingrained social etiquette of women's domestic sphere? Or is it all surface with nothing "solid" underneath? Gender theorist Judith Butler tackles similar questions about the coherence and construction of identity acclaimed book *Gender Trouble* (1990), wherein which she advances a hypothesis of gender identity that she coins "performativity." Butler provocatively argued in *Gender Trouble* that an individual is not endowed with an intrinsic gender identity, but rather undergoes a process of becoming a gender being precisely by presenting as that gender. In other words, the gendered individual is socially conditioned to behave in ways which actually serve to prove or qualify a gendered self which is presumed to be natural. Paradoxically, it is, however, the very assumption and repetition of these behaviors and mannerisms which come to constitute and signify the identity which is being performed. The spheres of the inner and outer selves become reflexive, a seemingly endless and infinitely complex feedback loop of identity and performance, leading to countless questions about what exactly it is that comprises someone's identity, what counts as their true self. Butler would answer the question with which I open my project with a resounding "No."

In this chapter, it is my aim to look critically first at "Phyllis and Rosamond" (1906) and then "A Society" (1920), putting these stories in conversation with Gender Trouble in order to

unearth and examine Woolf's intricate way of representing gender identity as something that is neither wholly manufactured, nor a direct reflection of a core identity. Much as Butler calls for representations of people that "trouble" or disturb binary understandings of a "natural" gender identity, Woolf takes to "troubling" in the fictional realm, using the form of the short story to question the nature of gendered perspective and illustrate the arbitrariness of gendered identity. Whereas Butler relies primarily on analysis of both real-life and fictional examples of gender performance to undertake her project of denaturalization, Woolf accomplishes this task by using short fiction as a medium through which to convey these de-stabilizing ideas that go on to raise questions about "real-world" gender identities; she does so by focusing specifically on characters and situations in which gendered expectations are distorted, inverted, or challenged.

I have decided to begin by concentrating on several of Woolf's short stories because the form offers a structural focus and concision regarding theme and symbolism that is difficult to find in her longer pieces. In shorter fiction, plot and character arc are of less concern, and the medium can become a space for authorial experimentation and play. This heightens the significance of other attributes such as tone and symbolism to overall readings of the pieces; in Woolf's case, the satirical or playful tone and imagery embedded in her short stories play a pivotal role in dictating the meaning or effect of the texts as a whole as at once critical and whimsical. Why are Woolf's short stories neglected despite their wealth of analytical fodder? Woolf is perhaps most well known her unique modernist "tunneling style" typified by shifting perspectives and a stream-of-consciousness narrative, appearing in novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway* and perfected in *The Waves*. Woolf is also celebrated for a host of other types of writings, including more traditional, linear narratives like *The Voyage Out* and *The Years*, her literary criticism, the overtly autobiographical *Moments of Being*, and the politically charged and

polemical *Three Guineas.* One reason that many of Woolf's short stories have been neglected could be their length; some are only a few pages long, and may appear to have less to offer than longer, more "complex" works. Because many were sketched while Woolf was in the process of writing her most renowned novels, perhaps there is a tendency to view them as either brief forays into frivolity or failed writing exercises that became obsolete following the publication of other, very successful, works. Woolf herself explains that short fiction, what she calls her "little stories" serve as both a welcome respite from her longer fiction in which she must continuously adhere to a sustained and specific structure, and a space where her ideas for novels may freely develop and expand without these sorts of limitations. While writing *To the Lighthouse*, in her diary Woolf writes, "For truth is I feel the need of an escapade after these serious poetic experimental books whose form is always so closely considered. I want to kick up my heels and be off. I want to embody all these innumerable little ideas and tiny stories which flash into my mind at all seasons…it will rest my head before starting the very serious, mystical poetical work which I want to come next" (Writer's Diary 104).

A serious analytical approach to this shorter fiction is imperative, however, because it is quite clear that this playful exploration of gender representation and gender performance did not fade into the background as her career advanced. In fact, it is quite the opposite; in examining how the nature of a gendered identity manifests itself in Woolf's short stories, one recognizes the roots of some of Woolf's more well known works, including *A Room of One's Own, Three Guineas,* and *Orlando*, which all deal with what it means to inhabit or "perform" a gendered identity. The stories I want to discuss are akin to a laboratory in which Woolf experiments with the performance of gendered subjectivity. In addition to depicting themes and theories regarding the performative nature of gender in a very succinct way, for Woolf, "little stories" serve as a

space that lends itself to an authorial play with and development of ideas or styles that might not be sustainable in longer pieces of writing. Such performance and play, I want to argue is central to Woolf's imagining of gender and performativity.

1. "Phyllis and Rosamond"

> *'What do I do?' echoed Phyllis. 'O order dinner and arrange the flowers!'*
> *'Yes, but what's your trade,' pursued Sylvia, who was determined not to be put off with phrases.*
> *'That's my trade; I wish it wasn't!'* (Woolf, "Phyllis and Rosamond" 27*).*

In "Phyllis and Rosamond," published in 1906, Woolf illustrates the tedious, repetitive nature of the domestic social roles that upper class young women are forced to inhabit by focusing on the quiet lives of two sisters. There are several significant ways in which Woolf frames their story as a feminist narrative. She prefaces the account by recalling "[l]et each man, I heard it said the other day, write down the details of a day's work." The use of the male pronoun here is initially striking in the context of a story that bears the title of two female names. Exclusion of the details of "woman's work" from literature is part of what Woolf sets out to problematize. She goes on to identify this disparity as the foundation for her narrative, writing "as such portraits as we have here are almost invariably of the male sex, who strut more prominently across the stage, it seems worthwhile to take as model one of those many women who cluster in the shade" (18). Here, Woolf not only points out the extraordinary predominance of men's narratives in literature and history at the expense of women's stories, but also alludes to a relationship between performance and gender.

For Woolf, the stage serves as an important metaphor for the sphere of historical and literary representation and recognition. Here, the male voice is privileged; every movement a male actor makes is emphasized by a spotlight while women are relegated to the darkened areas either on the outskirts of the stage or behind the curtain, excluded from the performance

completely. Woolf's language anticipates later analyses: in her 1986 book *The Creation of Patriarchy*, feminist theorist Gerda Lerner presents a similar vision of recorded history as a theatrical event in which "men have written the play, have directed the show, interpreted the meaning of the action. They have assigned themselves the most interesting, most heroic parts, giving women the supporting roles" (12). Much as the movements of Woolf's women remain obscured by the darkness of the backstage while the "real actors" strut out front, Lerner's women remain in the shadowy area of non-representation, without the agency to contribute anything to the performance that is not dictated by patriarchal constraints. According to Lerner, even the words that the female actors do utter, on the rare occasions they get to speak, are written and put into their mouths by men. When women move, they often do so in the patterns that would seem to be choreographed by men.

With Woolf's introduction describing the women relegated to a life in the shadows, it would seem more obvious perhaps that, in situations of performance, men should always be depicted as playing only active roles, writing the scripts and directing the show while the women passively await their instructions, huddling being the curtains. The picture Woolf actually goes on to illustrate later is quite different. In describing the largely unwritten role of women, Woolf compares the women to puppet masters:

> For a study of history and biography convinces any right minded person that these obscure figures occupy a place not unlike that of the showman's hand in the dance of the marionettes; and the finger is laid upon the heart. It is true that our simple eyes believed for many ages that the figures danced of their own accord, and cut what steps they chose; and the partial light which novelists and historians have begun to cast upon that dark and crowded place behind the scenes has done little as yet but show us how many wires there are, held in obscure hands, upon whose jerk or twist the whole figure of the dance depends ("Phyllis and Rosamond" 17).

Here, Woolf emphasizes the significant effect that women have actually had in constructing the world, the hand that they had in crafting the scenes that are presented, even though the women

often remain in the background, overlooked by both spotlights and pens. Woolf compares the job of these “obscure” women to the integral role of the puppet master who is best at his art precisely due to his ability to cover up the strings with which he inspires movement. Like the puppeteer, the women must, to some extent, deal in illusion, concealing the methods and intention of their agency. According to Woolf, for these women, the goal is to maintain an appearance of masculine control and use their carefully cultivated skills while still projecting a notion that they are only behaving in the choreographed ways which the men set forward. In this sense, the women use the shadows to their advantage, perfecting their performances in order covertly to seize agency. Woolf leaves it somewhat ambiguous as to whom she actually means to invoke with the image of the marionette, failing to provide an explicit answer. Upon careful analysis of the metaphor it becomes clear that Woolf is suggesting that, somewhat counter-intuitively, the marionettes are actually the men who appear to the untrained eye (and to themselves) to be in control of every aspect of the show. Perhaps the masculine identity of the marionette in relation to the women puppeteers is most apparent in Woolf’s description of the puppet master’s finger "laid upon the heart," suggesting perhaps, as will later be explored, that a man’s romantic affection or sentimental attachment is a discrete point of entry for a woman’s bid for agency.

Part of Woolf’s project in this piece is to exemplify the ability of the written word to illuminate the mechanics behind the performance, and thus unveil the constructedness of the seemingly “natural” scenes of history on which our understanding of humankind is based. The more that the behind-the-scene power of women's lives is documented and read, the more questionable the integrity of gender distinctions and the division of labor become. This suggests that art and writing in general can change how we perceive the real, and thus highlights the significance of exactly what Woolf undertakes in the task of writing this story that focuses on

assembling a portrait of people who are not often written about, who go largely unnoticed. Woolf discusses this exclusion in her essay "Women and Fiction," describing how "very little is known about women. The history of England is the history of the male line, not of the female. Of our fathers we know always some fact, some distinction...But of our mothers, our grandmothers, our great-grandmothers, what remains? Nothing but a tradition" (44). In this sense, any portrait of the daily routine of a woman's life represents a small transgression against patriarchal order. Any written record, fictional or not, of what we know as "tradition" (but never history) brings to light both the social constraints within which women must live and the constructedness of the belief that this is somehow a "natural" way of life. In reflecting the lives of women, Woolf gives women a historical lens through which they may recognize, slowly but surely, the oppressive and manufactured nature of their position.

Woolf suggests that the lives of the specific women in this story are meant to imply a larger, collective woman-shaped gap in narrative history, as well as the limited options and life experiences available to women of her own era. She explains how the situations of Phyllis and Rosamond "epitomise the qualities of many. It is a common case, because after all there are many young women, born of well-to-do, respectable, official parents; and they must all meet with much the same problems, and there can be, unfortunately, but little variety in the answers they make" (Woolf, "Phyllis and Rosamond"17). Thus, in one sense Woolf insists on seeing the particular narrative as a reflection of a larger collection of women's stories that have been left untold.

Significantly, Woolf chooses to focus particularly on the young women that exist in a sphere not intermingled with spheres that may be coded masculine, but rather a sphere that complements and is defined in opposition to that of the masculine. There is an immediate

emphasis on the domestic space as an unexplored and unrepresented area of labor. She is not interested in examining the lives of successful working women, which might ordinarily be seen as more worthy of representation. In fact, Woolf rejects the stories of Phyllis and Rosamond's professional sisters precisely because "their careers have so much likeness to those of men themselves that it is scarcely worth while to make them the subject of special enquiry." Woolf is more interested in the lives of those women whom she describes as having been born "frivolous, domestic, of lighter and more sensitive temperaments," those who "are condemned to be what in the slang of the century is called 'the daughters at home'" (18). Thus, Woolf turns specifically towards those stories which would ordinarily seem least remarkable, evoking with the lives of these two young women the countless experiences that are not deemed significant enough to make their way into written record.

The story of Phyllis and Rosamond begins with an emphasis on appearances, the external, with the reader as spectator. Woolf provides a description of the girls in order to set the stage for the performance that she will be examining, to "help us set them in their places, before we begin to investigate." This description formally orients the direction of the narrative as moving from outward to inward; from the outside of the body to the thoughts of the girls, as well as from situations of the players upon the stage towards the backstage area in which they ready their costumes, rehearse their lines. The third-person narrator here utilizes a neutral and impersonal tone, suggesting that he or she is capable of objectively and systematically "investigating" the sisters almost as scientific subjects. In looking at the external before delving into the internal, Woolf starts with a description of the "finished product," the actor in character, before delving into the complex efforts that go into this construction. This seemingly counter-intuitive structure mimics the way that one encounters another in reality; first, the eye perceives

and analyzes appearances, categorizing the probable nature of the person beneath by what is apparent from the outside.

> In person they are pink cheeked, vivacious; a curious eye will not find any regular beauty of feature; but their dress and demeanour give them the effect of beauty without its substance. They seem indigenous to the drawing room, as though, born in silk evening robes, they had never trod a rougher earth than the Turkey carpet, or reclined on harsher ground than the arm chair or the sofa (18).

Immediately, Woolf presents a scene completely set. To the eye, the girls are incredibly passive here, a part of the scenery along with the pieces of furniture. Woolf adopts the perspective of the male gaze, describing Phyllis and Rosamond as things to be ornamented by "dress and demeanour" and looked at, inspected by all whom so desire. There is an indication that, for men, these women have no identity that is not defined by their surroundings; they possess no "substance" that is not equated with a surface. Moreover, there is every reason for the men to think, based on appearance, that they are in a position of power; it is unlikely that women who a man conceives of as "born in silk evening robes," who has never so much as stepped out onto rocky streets, would have any kind of real-world knowledge or skill with which to undermine the men.

This idea of the "indigenous" domestic woman is exactly what Woolf sets out to explore by taking the reader behind the scenes, into the routines of the two young women. Woolf's narrator again takes on an analytical gaze, speaking almost as an anthropologist researching the culture of those "indigenous" to the drawing room, studying how the domestic women's customs and surroundings contribute to the culture of a distinct group of people; they are in their natural habitat. Initially, Woolf dwells on the laborious nature of life as a 'daughter at home,' the endless maintenance and careful work that goes into this career of not having a real career, the "professionalism" that is required to excel at their post, despite the fact that it is not considered a

"real" profession. Woolf continuously describes the sisters' daily activities and communications in a language that stresses the businesslike nature of living as a domestic woman:

> To see them in a drawing-room full of well dressed men and women, is to see the merchant in the Stock exchange, or the barrister in the temple. This, every motion and word proclaims, is their native air; their place of business, their professional arena. Here, clearly, they practice the arts in which they have been instructed since childhood. Here, perhaps, they win their victories and earn their bread(18).

Woolf juxtaposes the idea of the "native" with a discourse of highly trained professionalism in order to suggest that there is a disconnect between the appearance or effect of the performance and the calculated labor going on backstage. Domestic work is not unlike those careers which professional men pursue after years of education or artistic instruction. Phyllis and Rosamond have received a specific training in order fully to perfect their art; they know how to navigate the social scene surrounding them just as a Stock exchange worker effortlessly negotiates a better price or a barrister executes his legal duties. The sense that they appear to be native to the drawing room, then, is not simply a mark of their lack of education, nor of their sex, but rather evidence that they are professionals who have mastered their work through years of practice. Although the women appear to be "indigenous" to the domestic space, this is a marker of their professional and artistic excellence rather than the fact that the sisters are incapable of engaging in intelligent projects, inside or outside of the drawing room. The sisters are performance experts, just as a seasoned actor successfully presents a specifically constructed identity to an audience, making them forget about any "offstage" existence.

Even once they have retired from the more public space of the drawing room to their rooms, the sisters' talk is neither of secret desires, nor of jokes, but rather "it is not very edifying; it is the 'shop' of business men; they calculate their profits and losses and have clearly no interest at heart except their own" (19). Because these women work from their home, they have no regular hours, and, in turn, no time off to relax, to concern themselves with pursuits other than

their work. Their lives are spent dressing in their ‘uniforms’ and arriving in time for their business appearances; for breakfast, for lunch, for visits, for parties. Toward the end of the story, as they are conversing with women who have jobs and lives outside of the domestic sphere, Phyllis actually articulates her sense that she has been brought up to perform a trade, that she has a particular station. When one of her more “worldly” peers asks her what it is she does, Phyllis replies: “O order dinner and arrange the flowers!” When her companion explains that she meant to ask what was her trade, Phyllis replies “*That’s* my trade; I wish it wasn’t,” going on to assert that most young women are, essentially, bound to the domestic, disguised as free-acting agents (27).

Woolf admits, however, that it "would be as unjust as it would be easy to press this metaphor till it suggested that the comparison was appropriate and complete in all its parts. It fails; but where it fails and why it fails will take some time and attention to discover"(17). Woolf never clarifies exactly why this metaphor of professional domesticity is not an adequate representation, but rather goes on to explore the numerous ways in which Phyllis and Rosamonds' roles as "daughters at home" shapes every moment of their lives, their ways of thinking and navigating the world. The workday metaphor ultimately falls short in the sense that the sisters have virtually no personhood outside of their project as domestic women. Like town doctors who are always on call or artists who spend much of their free time practicing, their art comprises a substantial portion of their identity. There is no sense that they have the privilege of developing a self outside of their prescribed roles as perhaps would be the case for a working man who is not particularly specialized and therefore does not see his trade as a “profession.” He just performs odd jobs, and once such a man’s day ends, he is free to be a father, a husband, and entertain hobbies he may have outside of the workplace. Someone who performs assorted or

menial tasks for a living has an identity that is not necessarily consumed by the nature of his job; a vendor in a market may not be thinking of sorting vegetables while eating meals, visiting friends, or in the presence of the family. This is not the case for women in the domestic sphere; because their home is their "place of business," they are allowed no distance from their jobs and must be eternally on-call.

Discussing Woolf's take on a domestic professionalism, it is difficult not to include mention of her essay "Professions for Women," in which she discusses the multiple mental and spiritual obstacles (such as the symbolic slaughter of the "Angel in the House," the idealized passive woman) that a woman must face in order to become a writer, or to pursue occupations reserved for men. In describing the her own interaction with the "Angel," Woolf uses similar language to juxtapose the "arts" of the domestic woman with a freedom to pursue a truly "professional" career: "She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily...I took the my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered, 'My dear, you are a young woman...Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own'" ("Professions for Women" 58). Phyllis and Rosamond, artistic "Angels" in their own rite, provide another example of how, for domestic women, professionalism is a process of being and *becoming*; it is something that reaches beyond the span of the workday, and to be achieved, requires an intensely self-aware effort.

With her assertion that the metaphor of the workday is somehow insufficient, Woolf points to the notion that she is really tackling something far more insidious, more all-encompassing. Rosamond's and Phyllis's job, their art, extends beyond simply fulfilling certain tasks or crafting something that is external from them. Rather, all of their work and energy goes

toward constructing themselves, building and embodying their identities as young ladies. Every movement they make is a contribution to the strenuous performance that makes up who they are and how they are perceived. The analogy between professionalism and the life of the domestic woman breaks down most apparently in the lack of choice that domestic women have in selecting their profession; they are forced to master the art of becoming (and proving that they already are entirely) something which they have not chosen consciously to be. This disparity between an elected profession and the lot of the domestic woman is perhaps most apparent in Phyllis' rather shocking self-description of her own role, stating that Sylvia "must remember that most young ladies are slaves" (Woolf, "Phyllis and Rosamond" 26). This is where the difference between professionalism and being a "young lady" becomes quite apparent: while barristers or stock brokers presumably enjoy options in choosing a line of business, domestic women are forced into this position without choosing the art that they must learn to master. Moreover, the professional artist's product is typically something separate from himself, something he can move on from or escape, not necessarily defining the entirety of his existence. For the sisters, on the other hand, their canvas is the self, and they are shackled to this "product" for the duration of their lives. They live an art that they are forced to learn. The slave analogy becomes very poignant; much as the labor of the domestic woman defines every area of her personhood, so too is the slave bound to an identity never chosen but impossible to escape.

The behaviors and affectations that appear to be so natural, instinctive to the sisters, are actually put on through a process of identity construction and repetition that is central to Judith Butler's theory of performativity. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains how identity, although appearing to be natural or inherent, is actually actively performed by a subject:

> According to the understanding of identification as an enacted fantasy or incorporation, however, it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this

> idealization is an effect of corporeal signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (136).

Rosamond and Phyllis are described as being native or “indigenous” to the drawing room, ordained with domestic, “frivolous” natures that would make being a “daughter of the home" natural. What Woolf illustrates and Butler later asserts, however, is how performativity, self-regulation, and self- suppression go into the creation of the self. This self-construction, if done properly, convinces an audience that women’s appearance and behaviors express a cohesive “inner self,” conveying the idea that Phyllis and Rosamond are innately “young ladies” through and through. To call this maintenance of identity a profession is to undermine the claim to a natural grounding of sexual differences. For the sisters, identity is something of a feedback loop; they do in order to become, and, conversely, continuously prove that they already are by doing.

Butler’s theory of gender performativity proves helpful here in exploring the way in which Woolf presents the sisters’ identity as a specifically gendered theatrical performance, building from the stage metaphor with which she opened the piece, and illustrating how personal agency can be found in constructing one’s identity, even within a situation in which one is obligated to fulfill a certain persona. This overwhelming element of identity performance is clearly visible in the language Woolf employs to explain the daily life of the two girls, evoking what Butler later describes as a performance of the gendered self meant to imply a naturalized core identity, obtained through adopted "words, acts," and "gestures:"

> Lady Hibbert is a severe critic of such performances; she has noted whether her daughters looked well, spoke well[,] behaved well; whether they attracted the right people and repelled the wrong; whether on the whole the impression they left was favorable. from the multiplicity and minuteness of her comments it is easy to see that two hours

> entertainment is, for artists of this kind, a very delicate and complicated piece of work. Much, it seems, depends on the way they acquit themselves. The daughters answer submissively and then keep silence, whether their mother praises or blames: and her censure is severe ("Phyllis and Rosamond" 19).

Here, Woolf uses the word "performance" to describe the nature of the sisters' interactions in drawing rooms, highlighting the theatrical aspect of these ritualized meetings. Much as if the girls were acting in a play, they are given a run-down of where and when they were most believable as the characters they portray, and where they remained unconvincing in the act of portraying their constructed selves. This performative trope is, of course, reinforced by Woolf's use of the word "entertainment," as well as the description of the women as "artists" creating a "delicate and complicated piece of work." Such language stresses not only the amount of energy and precision that goes into the labor of successfully playing the role of the "young lady," but also the manufactured nature of such an identity in the first place. If the sisters are innately ladylike, if they naturally possess the identities that they perpetuate, then such a description would not make sense. In that case, behaving as a young lady would not be construed as something that is artificially produced with a great amount of care and effort. If this self-presentation were natural, reflective of some “authentic” inner self, it would not be described as so delicate in nature. The passage poignantly illustrates Butler's assertion that outward appearances and actions "produce the effect of an internal core of substance but produce this on the surface of the body." Lady Hibbert focuses on how successfully the girls utilize their bodies in terms of dress, speech, and behavior, in order to leave their audience with a positive and convincing impression of an inner self. In other words, in holding the sisters accountable, their mother is preoccupied only with the relationship between identity and the external, and the overall impression of the self that the external implies to the spectator.

The above passage also indicates that the performance of the self is something that is regulated, continuously reinforced by outside sources. Woolf illustrates how the "rules" for identity performance are imposed by powers that operate independently from the self, and are maintained by holding individuals accountable for their behaviors. This idea of accountability, exemplified here by Woolf, is echoed by West and Zimmerman in their 1991 piece, "Doing Gender." West and Zimmerman explain individual accountability as an integral part of gender performativity even as Butler describes how it is maintained in a social context:

> These descriptions name, characterize, formulate, explain, excuse, excoriate, or merely take notice of some circumstance or activity and thus place it within some social framework….Such descriptions are themselves accountable, and societal members orient to the fact that their activities are subject to comment. Actions are often designed with an eye to their accountability, that is, how they might look and how they might be characterized. The notion of accountability also encompasses those actions undertaken so that they are specifically unremarkable and thus not worthy of more than a passing remark, because they are seen to be in accord with culturally approved standards (49).

The rather harsh feedback that Phyllis and Rosamond receive from their mother after an inferior "performance" at a social event serves to diminish the value of their performance. Accountability, then, has to do with the seamlessness of the production; how closely does it resemble an ideal while obscuring the fact that it is, at least in some part, a construction? In this way, the marionettes that Woolf somewhat ambiguously presents at the beginning of the piece can possibly be re-imagined not only as men, but, in some situations, as the bodies of the women themselves. The women, too, are the figures which seem to move naturally, of their own accord, but are actually being controlled by something covertly lingering in the shadows, in this case, being a knowledge, whether conscious or subconscious, of which movements are acceptable or appear most natural. Performing gender takes practice, and, perhaps, critique, for the hand to learn to twist "naturally."

Even though West and Zimmerman (as well as Butler), apply their theories equally to both sides of the gender and sex binaries, Woolf has explained how historically, women have not had the chance to record their own narratives. This makes it all the more significant that she, much earlier than these later scholars of gender, understood the importance of putting to paper the cost of maintaining a social identity that is largely determined by gender. As Woolf observes near the beginning of the story:

> You must be in a position to follow these young ladies home, and to hear their comments over the bedroom candle. You must be by them when they wake the next morning; and you must attend their progress throughout the day. When you have done this, not for one day but for many days then you will be able to calculate the values of those impressions which are to be received by night in the drawing room ("Phyllis and Rosamond" 18)

Exhibiting these moments of accountability embedded within the tradition of domestic upper-class femininity (and calculating "the values of those impressions") adds to the reader's comprehension of such an identity as something that is regulated in individuals from the outside, a social construct. Without stories such as "Phyllis and Rosamond," it is nearly impossible to "follow" these women, to understand the complexity of the countless factors that go into their creation. Male writers cannot represent these particularly revealing moments of performativity or the effort that goes into a domestic woman's performance because they are a part of the audience from whom the backstage must be concealed. Woolf, having spent a great deal of her youth confined to the domestic sphere, is more aware of the kind of accountability demands to which women are her class are subject. In "Phyllis and Rosamond," then, she simultaneously demands more literature by women while exemplifying the kind of psychosocial insights that women's writing can provide us with regarding the nature of gender performance in relation to "reality."

Woolf links the domestic duties of the sisters to a well-rehearsed act, particularly in stressing the repetitive, perfectly timed nature of their actions. "At four they drove out with Lady

Hibbert to pay calls. This performance consisted in driving solemnly to one house after another where they had dined or hoped to dine, and depositing two or three cards in the servant's hand. At once place they entered and drank a cup of tea, and talked of the weather for precisely fifteen minutes" (23). Woolf again uses the word "performance" to describe the sisters' routine behaviors, indicating that they are, during this time, in character, presenting specific accounts of themselves. This element of a precisely choreographed routine is present throughout the story. Movements are synchronized by a strict schedule: arriving in time for breakfast, changing for a 1:30 lunch, knowing to spend exactly fifteen minutes at each visit in order to return home by 6 o' clock. This repetition of actions in and across time in order to establish a stable identity speaks very much to Butler's notion of performativity. "[G]ender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 140). The sisters' strictly regimented, repetitive actions are described as numbered and ritualistic in that they know how precisely how many cards to place into the servants hands, know how long discussions regarding the weather are to be maintained. These are well practiced rituals of daily life; their lives constitute a performance so well staged that it can be measured in counts, never to deviating from a calculated rhythm.

When explaining why they are not allowed to invite female friends to come to stay, Phyllis says "We are daughters, until we become married women" (Woolf, "Phyllis and Rosamond" 27). On one level, this quote is interesting because it exemplifies how domestic women, regardless of age or marital status, are continuously only defined through their relationships to men. Their prospects in life, as they have been taught, can essentially be summed up in that one sentence. On another level, this assertion demonstrates the sisters are distinctly aware that, after their time as daughters at home has ended, they are to marry, a logical next step

that their parents have planned. There is a very specific trajectory for the course of their lives already in place, a script to which they must remain faithful. Somewhat ironically, at one point Rosamond states that they "were educated for marriage." Moreover, like almost everything they do, they are expected to make this transition at a very specific time in order to maintain the integrity of their station. This becomes clear when, after lunch with a suitor, Phyllis explains that "it is June now; our parents give me till July: little Middleton is the only one." Phyllis, though not in love with the man, expresses his acceptability as a partner, stating that "we would be a worthy pair: something like our parents!"(22). Woolf implies the script which they are expected to abide by is one that has pre-existed themselves, a kind of history which reproduces itself with each generation of women at home. Their existences are comprised of a series of repetitions, both big and small: dinner at six, arrange the flowers, be married before thirty and all the better if he is a man like the one your mother married.

Paradoxically, this routine serves as a site of agency and subversion for the girls. It is the execution of repetitive, discrete bodily acts that conceals the real work that the girls undertake, the sophisticated negotiations being made in order to ensure that they seize every opportunity that they can. Reminiscent of Woolf's allusion to "the finger laid on the heart," this sense of a well-rehearsed performance being used to procure power is apparent as the sisters communicate with one another across the table while dining with two men; Sir Thomas, "a handsome piece on the board, but of no individual importance," and Mr. Middleton, one of Phyllis' suitors (20).Woolf describes how "while her lips murmured ohs and aws of horror, her eyes were telegraphing across the table 'I am doubtful.' If she had nodded her sister would have begun to practice those arts by which many proposals had been secured already. Rosamond, however, did not yet know enough to make up her mind. She telegraphed merely, 'Keep him in play.'" Here,

Woolf presents the reader with a sort of subversion of the performance which is expected from the sisters, dictating how they take control of the situation while simultaneously appearing to give their all to the dinner scene. They invoke a thorough knowledge of a routine that they have memorized, repeating the words and sounds that will allow them to discretely continue the conversation. Woolf's use of the word "play" also suggests that this highly gendered, potentially decisive situation is something of a game for the girls, at once whimsical and light-hearted while also necessitating effective strategy and concentration in order to "win." Moreover, from their silenced position, they have established a language with which they can clearly communicate with one another, and thus collaborate on decisions regarding the collective futures of everyone in the room. In fact, the men in the story are relatively powerless, manipulated. The only speech that Woolf allows any man in the story is of the same violent masculine nature that Woolf later discusses in *Three Guineas.* Sir Thomas represents a tradition of traditional masculinity which Woolf despises, presumably telling some lengthy story of politics and war. “The question was should she marry him? This was the point she had reached when Lord Mayo was assassinated”(21). In terms of narrative, these men are defined solely in relation to the women of the story, “pawns” to be kept in play according to the sisters’ decisions regarding their next move.

Once outside of their “indigenous” sphere, however, the bourgeois space in which they are “professionals,” the sisters find themselves wholly at a loss, for the same performances that they had executed so flawlessly at the dinner table are no longer powerful, no longer expected. Once they move into the realm of the presumably middle-class, bohemian Bloomsbury women, the identity that they manufacture for themselves as “young ladies” ultimately eclipses their identity as individuals, as humans. This is expressed when Miss Sylvia Tristam, embodying a

different type of socioeconomic femininity that baffles the sisters, realizes that she “had never considered the Hibberts as human beings before; but had called them ‘young ladies’” (26). This relates back to the idea of the domestic young woman being treated as a slave, robbed of an essential humanity which is then replaced by a set of prescriptive actions and absences of action. Alienation accompanies the traditional domestic life. The sisters were necessarily deprived of the formal training and education that would have enabled them to pursue some trade outside of the home, having been raised since birth to remain dependent on men. Moreover, because they lack the kind of language and values with which women who exist outside of the domestic sphere are familiar, they lack any means to communicate meaningfully with other women. Sylvia here occupies the interesting space between peer and outsider; although she is also a woman, she has had a much different upbringing, presumably receiving an education, and thus has learned a type of a womanhood which Woolf presents as highly estranged from the milieu of the domestic “young ladies.” In this way, she is in the position of both the distanced spectator and someone who still recognizes a trace of herself within the girls, beneath their manners and expensive dresses. The sisters, however, remain so estranged from the experiences of these "working women" that they are incapable of joining in discourse with their female peers; the two are desperate for interaction with other less conventional women, but see them as of an entirely different species than themselves.

This disconnect becomes particularly evident as the Bloomsbury girls’ conversation turns to passionate love, a concept with which the sisters are particularly unfamiliar, not even sure they would be capable of experiencing such an emotion: “They sat thus, unconscious of their own silence, like people shut out from some merrymaking in the cold and the wind; invisible to the feasters within. But in reality the presence of these two silent and hungry eyed young women

was felt to be oppressive by all the people there; although they did not exactly know why" (26). Here, Woolf illustrates the tension felt between two "types" of women who are outsiders to one another's spheres. This collective discomfort, Woolf implies, also stems from some sense that the sisters appear to observers inhuman, nothing more than a collection of dresses and parties and rituals; they seem limited to the superficial, conventional identity that they have constructed. Alluding to these well rehearsed routines as all that she knows of the girls, Sylvia asks, "Are you solid all the way through?" (27). Sylvia seems to be asking whether there is in fact some distinction between the identity that the sisters project on the surface and a private, more "true" self which has hitherto been concealed beneath a veneer. Are the girls are somehow hollow, not in possession of a definitive identity separate from the exterior that they present? Here, Woolf presents us with one of the risks of identity construction. Phyllis and Rosamond, in succeeding at their performances, appear to have lost something essential beneath their façade. In the Bloomsbury environment it is not clear which identity they are meant to perform. It is as if, constrained within the identities they have constructed for themselves, they do not and cannot find a "self' in a location which does not value or validate their status.

Conversely, in their own natural habitat, Woolf illustrates that the women thrive, assuming an active role in the construction of their own identities even while their behaviors relegate them to an oppressed position. They may not be free to choose the men they marry, but they have agency in deciding how they will dress and converse when they meet with suitors, exerting the power to attract or repel men. They are required to go to dinner parties, but they put in the effort to behave appropriately in order to impress audiences. By presenting this coexistence of external repression alongside an active individualistic construction of the self, Woolf implies that there is a dual nature to the oppression of women. As Woolf writes, "long

captivity had corrupted them within and without" (26). Being "educated for marriage," these domestic women have internalized the identities that they have been held accountable for, the very ideas that constrain them to the home. In this way, Woolf illustrates the complexity of the situation, the impossibility of distinguishing between that which is solely shaped in response to an external force and that which is truly coming from some independent desire, because, actually, the distinction between the two is virtually non-existent.

Butler calls into question any such external/internal dichotomy. In their book *Judith Butler and Political Theory,* Samuel Chambers and Terrell Carver write: " Butler consistently rejects a mind/body dualism and repeatedly insists on taking the body as a site of theoretical and political problematising" (55). This problematization of the mind/body dichotomy is mapped in terms of the tensions and convergences between behaviors and thoughts of the girls, both at home and among the Bloomsbury women. In their sphere, the discrepancy between the sisters' actions and reactions are apparent. No matter how hard they try, however, the sisters cannot effectively communicate with non-domestic women once they have left the location for which they were trained, suggesting that they have actually become at one with their usual surroundings; in other words, the performance has become the "real."

Butler argues that it would both be incorrect and wholly unproductive to view individual agency and the socially enforced "constructedness" of the self as mutually exclusive. Agency in the process of construction is a site for subversion, for power. According to Butler:

> [f]or identity to be an effect means that it is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary...Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible. That the constituted status of identity is misconstrued along these two conflicting lines suggests the ways in which the feminist discourse on cultural construction remains trapped within the unnecessary binarism of free will and determinism (*Gender Trouble* 147)

Here, Butler explains the significance of recognizing individual agency, both the conscious and subconscious work that contributes to the creation of a self, alongside "deterministic" constraints on identity. For Woolf's purposes, this element of determinism manifests itself in the rules and expectations in place for young, middle class women of the domestic sphere. Thus, although Woolf's portrayal of the sisters as simultaneously active and oppressed, even powerful in their socially constrained state, initially seems contradictory and potentially troubling, this tension is actually crucial to an understanding of both Woolf and Butler's ideas. Butler conceives of identity as, by definition, an interplay between individual actions and socially imposed regulations. Just as Butler explicitly rejects binaries that oversimplify the relationship between individual agency and social construction, mind and body, Woolf too rejects these same binaries by purposefully complicating the seemingly straight-forward relationship between the passive women in the shadows and men strutting upon a stage. Moreover, the adherence to these types of dichotomies results in what Butler describes as problematic even within more contemporary forms of feminism, more than eighty years after Woolf wrote "Phyllis and Rosamond." Interestingly, Woolf's heightened emphasis on the performative, and, at times, very self-conscious nature of domestic femininity within this story works in a way that actually anticipates Butler's conception of a drag performance. What happens when gender identity is de-naturalized further, as occurs when play involves drag (the self-conscious performance of an identity other than the one conventionally expected or assigned)?

2. Drag and Parody

Judith Butler explains that drag, the trying on and putting off of exaggerated sexed or gendered features, serves as a form of gender parody in which hyperbolic surface impressions suggest the constructedness of a "natural" or taken-for-granted gender identity. According to

Butler, drag, although not necessarily always subversive, often serves as a medium "that may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms," (*Bodies that Matter* 125). Although, strictly speaking, there is no actual case of cross-gendered dress or performance present in "Phyllis and Rosamond," the descriptions of the sisters' lives depict their daily routine as analogous to that of a drag performer. Whether intentionally or not, Woolf continuously emphasizes the conscious putting-on and taking-off of the kind of specifically gendered personas, clothes, and ritualized behaviors that resonates quite profoundly with drag performances.

Specifically, Woolf stresses the crucial role of apparel, of correctly ornamenting an outer shell, in developing the "character" that the sisters portray. Even when in a hurry, proper costuming is of high priority in the routine of the sisters; "their haste allowed them to put on their clothes with great care and dexterity, and the result was scrupulously surveyed by each sister in turn before they went down" (Woolf, "Phyllis and Rosamond"19). They struggle into costumes as quickly and as efficiently as possible before they must take their respective places. The sisters, much like drag performers, strive to convey a popular impression of an entire group of very real people, in this case the "daughters at home," through their adoption of very specific dress and mannerisms. This emphasis on costume choices, something that is almost always integral to a successful drag performance, appears again toward the end of the story, when, upon Phyllis's insistence that she and Rosamond are quite similar to dozens of other domestic young ladies Sylvia replies: "'I know your evening dresses....I see you pass before me in beautiful processions, but I have never heard you speak"(27). Sylvia embodies the audience member's perspective, admittedly relying primarily on spectacle and vision to apprehend the identity of the girls; she makes sense of their existence in society just as the audience of a drag performance relies on the

often excessively glamorized dress of the drag performer to understand that they are playing a familiar part, inhabiting a cultural role. Moreover, although their dress is what characterizes them as women, the cultural trope of the "young lady," the sisters' dress also plays a large role in marking them as "other" or incomprehensible once they have left their particular domestic sphere. Because the type of femininity associated with Bloomsbury clashes with the fashion typical of high society, the girls' attire is unintelligible to the Bloomsbury girls, symbolic of an identity built upon upper-class conventions that do not interest them.

Sylvia asserts that her knowledge of the girls is based on their participation in "processions," in public shows for which they are outfitted with costumes. Just as a drag queen often develops her own persona for an audience, perhaps even taking on a unique name and personality that only makes sense in the context of the performance, Sylvia's account of the girls suggests the significance of spectacle and costuming to her interpretation of their "personas." Indeed, her uncomfortable interaction with the girls takes the shape of the kind of curiosity one might encounter when taking a moment to consider whether there is supposedly some "real," other self that exists underneath the veneer of a character, a sentiment that is made explicit when she asks whether or not the girls are solid, whether they live as entirely different people when they are offstage.

Here, Woolf's use of drag has the potential to highlight the unstable nature of gender and identity performativity. As I have previously explored, Butler perceives the futility of attempting to separate completely (or, perhaps, even beginning to separate) the realm of the external performance from the realm of the autonomous self. In other words, performativity, as exemplified by Phyllis and Rosamond, consists of a performance that simultaneously forms and substantiates the very self that the performance is meant to qualify or "prove," the "inner" self

that Sylvia so hopes to find beneath the facade of spectacle. This idea is supported by the fact that the sisters cannot find a satisfactory answer or explanation to Sylvia's question, and instead feel like failures as individuals, calling themselves "frauds." The girls can only recount their regimented domestic duties and activities in response to the difficult question of whether they have integral selves: "You see, we're brought up just to come out in the evening and make pretty speeches, and well, marry I suppose..."(27). In a round-about way, they acknowledge that they are formed by and constituted of their most constructed behaviors.

This is where, according to Butler, drag performance becomes useful in examining even the identities that seem most deeply centered in some subjective self, particularly in terms of sex and gender identity. "To claim that all gender is like drag, or is drag, is to suggest that 'imitation' is at the heart of the heterosexual project and its gender binarisms, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 125). In portraying the strictly gendered lives of Phyllis and Rosamond as a kind of never-ending drag show in which there is no true distinction between the stage persona and a "real," offstage identity, Woolf illustrates much the same point that Butler found integral to the political applications of drag; both present very similar ideas regarding the performative nature of the self, and particularly the gendered self, which is formed by the same impressions that it seems to create. Butler writes, "drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (*Gender Trouble* 137).What is perhaps most interesting about Butler's argument in terms of Woolf's attribution of drag-like characteristics to the sisters in the story is this tension between the inner and the outer trappings of gender identity, Woolf's continuous mission to

probe beneath the surface of an identity that seems innate or complete in order to upset the relationship between the realm of the psyche and the body in a way that is never straightforward and often self-reflexive.

Although Butler does not dismiss the significance of the role of the body in effectively performing drag, stating that "drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed," it is important to note that the bodies of the two girls are only accessible through Woolf's literary descriptions, and thus, Woolf engages in a sort of linguistic drag that seems to serve much the same purposes as Butler's vision of more strictly embodied drag (*Gender Trouble* 137). Despite the fact that the matter of anatomy is not put into question as explicitly it will be in, say, *Orlando*, the concept of biological determinism is obviously prevalent as it remains the foundational blueprint from and through which the girls must construct themselves. Arguably, Woolf introduces a sort of drag-like gender play elsewhere with her comparison of the sisters to masculine businessmen and "shopkeepers." The girls, described by Woolf as "manly" in their professional dealings, conduct their business underneath a facade of expected "feminine" passivity and coyness in front of suitors and society members, men who are their "clients" and business pawns. The tension between these two images (that is, the demure domestic girl and the actively cunning businessman) suggests something of the dressing up of a traditionally "masculine" work ethic in order to fit into the context of the women's performance space; a masculine self masquerades as something other, creating a different stage persona.

In keeping with Butler's theory, it is important to recognize that the same masculine "businesslike" practices that are being covered up are necessitated by the eternally silenced role of the domestic daughter, a character which is, in turn, necessary to mask the business that is

taking place even as the sisters "ooh" and "ahh" over the suitor's words. Thus, neither "self" is more intrinsically valid or essentially true than the other, but rather are both simultaneously and mutually reinforcing. If we take this particular example as an engagement with drag, the boundaries between inner and outer become ever more skewed along gender lines to the point where a definitive determination of a core gender identity becomes quite impossible. For instance, it is possible to read the story as Woolf's presentation of people with masculine inclinations (toward shop keeping, business work) dressing up in extravagant dresses and adopting the mannerisms of young ladies or to interpret Woolf's masculinized descriptions of the girls' activities as figuratively "dressing up" the young ladies as men. Indeed, neither explanation seems fully satisfactory, lending further credence to the notion that there is no identifiable intrinsically gendered identity in Woolf's fictional work.

Alongside drag (alas, perhaps it would be more accurate to refer to drag as a subdivision of this practice), Butler names other types of gender parody as significant means whereby notions of a stable and central sex and gender identity can be challenged, precisely by exhibiting and calling into question the processes through which sex and gender distinctions, and, in turn, the qualities attributed to different sexes, are formed. According to Butler, gender parody is defined as somehow “abnormal” or unusual repetitions of gender performance or gender signification, often relying on exaggeration or hyperbole, which have the goal or the effect of denaturalizing norms and binaries. Butler proposes that “the parodic repetition of gender exposes as well the illusion of gender identity as an intractable depth and inner substance” (*Gender Trouble* 146). Gender play will necessarily engage with common tropes of how people of different sexes are expected "naturally" to behave, but with the aim of calling these very assumptions into question. As Butler puts it, although "the gender meanings taken up in these

parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic re-contextualization. As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself" (138). Thus, gender parody involves an engagement with or an adoption of sex and gender norms presumed to be innate or normal in a manner which questions their status as natural. Stylistically, Woolf appears deeply invested in engaging with these sorts of tensions that arise from exaggerated and "de-naturalizing" performances, later experimenting boldly with the parodic form in "A Society" (1920). Here, Woolf incorporates elements of gender performance and exaggeration into her writing on a formal level, effectively commenting on the erroneous assumption of an "original" or natural gendered perspective by exploiting the short story format in new ways.

3. "A Society"

Written in 1920, and thus representing a later stage in Woolf's thought, "A Society" is more overtly parodic than "Phyllis and Rosamond;" as the title implies, the story is quite explicitly a parody of the structure of society itself. In this short story, Woolf engages with what I have described as Butlerian gender parody to represent with the lives of a group of young women who, having "agreed that the objects of life were to produce good people and good books," set out to "find out how far these objects were now attained by men" before going about the business of bringing more children into the world ("A Society" 120). In order to investigate the role and effects of parody in this context, it is important first acknowledge to the situation, indicative of a larger intellectual climate, that gave rise to Woolf's work. In the Fall of 1920, Arnold Bennett published a book entitled "Our Women: Chapters on Sexual Discord," which was met with much attention and was soon reviewed by Bloomsbury regular Desmond

MacCarthy, writing under the alias of "Affable Hawk." In his *New Statesman* review of the book, "Hawk" remarks that he agrees "wholeheartedly with Bennett's assertion that 'women are inferior to men in intellectual power, especially in that kind of power which is described as creative'" (Dick 53). While Woolf directly and rather bitingly refutes this claim in her essay "Our Women," published in the *New Statesman* shortly after Hawk's review, critic Susan Dick suggests in her article "'What Fools We Were!': Virginia Woolf's 'A Society'" that it is useful to look at the relationship between the incident and "A Society" in determining "the special qualities of this story *as* a story." (55) Indeed, I think that Dick's observations about the real-world connections of "A Society" ground the piece further as an overt critique of patriarchal culture.

Not only is the story noteworthy, as Dick suggests, for its "didacticism, its playfulness," and "its satirical views of contemporary society," but also for its function as a gender parody, responding in some part to the words of real men who are speaking on gender (55). The tale becomes an appropriation of their understanding of sexual difference in a way that challenges masculinist assumptions by displacing them onto the consciousnesses of female characters. Thus, these men in particular represent a larger body of men, and come to serve as a site for direct parodic subversion of a masculine, elitist intellectual culture. The women decide to evaluate the "usefulness" of men to society, and as Dick states, "they set out to ask and invert Bennett's and Affable Hawk's assumptions, for these women want to know if men have produced anything of high value" (54).

In this way, the story serves to reiterate and to parody the very ideas that literary men (at least those among them that have the same misogynistic views about women's creativity as Hawk and Bennett) hold about women. This type of parody manifests itself in the straightforward reversal of these stereotypes by the women within the story, presenting these

opinions in a manner so exaggerated that it is simply impossible to read them as anything other than parodic. In this case, Woolf is parodying the way that, in the context of an intensely patriarchal intellectual climate (and, of course, world), women are to some extent taught blindly to value male intellectual achievement above all else simply by virtue of the fact that this material is authored by men. Thus, on one level, the story presents women parodying themselves or, more specifically, parodying a cultural vision of themselves. It is worth noting that Woolf, from the very beginning of the piece, explicitly chooses a female narrator who comes from within the group of young women around whom the story is centered, writing "[s]ix or seven of us were sitting one day after tea" ("A Society" 118). The perspective through which Woolf presents the reader with the parody is one that is coded feminine, narrating the events from a position firmly within the society of women who we see take on these (masculinely coded) gendered assumptions, which they then go on to question and subvert.

A mocking of the idea that women should worship men is a crucial point of departure for the narrative, as Woolf introduces the women in the story by stating how they continuously "drew round the fire and began as usual to praise men- how strong, how noble, how brilliant, how courageous, how beautiful they were- how we envied those who by hook or by crook managed to get attached to one for life" (118).Woolf's usage of the phrase "as usual" here is perhaps the first indication that the piece will be parodic in nature, drawing explicitly on what Woolf holds to be a masculinized conception of women as creatures whose duty it is, or at least should be, to laud the male character which is somehow innately superior in every imaginable way to that of a woman. Moreover, in introducing the women as entities that only exist in relation to and for men, it is quite interesting to note that Woolf enacts a similar masculine, radically self-centered conception of the lives of women that she later describes in *A Room of*

One's Own (1929) as a distinct side effect of men writing female characters. In *A Room,* Woolf writes of this perceived defect within male writing:

> It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman's life is that; and how little can a man know even of that when he observes through the black or rosy spectacles which sex puts on his nose (*A Room,* 82-3).

Here, Woolf lays out the problem with men's depiction of women, suggesting that there is some flaw inherent to the nature of men's writing, or more specifically, to the way that men are socialized to understand and imagine women. In the context of Bennett, Affable Hawk, and "A Society," Woolf seems to be posing a statement that is a simple inversion of Hawk's assertion that women are inherently incapable of achieving intellectual excellence. This section of *A Room of One's Own* serves a similar function to "A Society," in that both cast doubt on the authority or omniscience of male authorship just as men are wont to criticize the writings of women authors. Where in "A Society" Woolf conveys this message through the parodic and absurd citation of extreme misogyny, in *A Room of One's Own,* she directly outlines and critiques the same flaws of a male-centric literary canon that she mocks in the short story.

Woolf represents the male perspective as a product of a lifetime of gazing though "spectacles which sex puts on his nose," optical lenses tinted with sexist conventions and stereotypes. According to Woolf, these spectacles have the effect of distorting everything men see or imagine (in this case, women) so that the subject appears to conform to preconceived idealizations (in this case, expectations regarding what it means to be a particular sex). The spectacles of manhood can even result in a collective blindness, "a sport the size of a shilling on the back of the head which one can never see for oneself"(90). Notably, Woolf specifically locates a sexed perspective in a piece of apparel that is manmade, something external to the body rather than deriving from any piece of "natural" anatomy: the heart, the groin, the mind. Here,

Woolf represents the effects sex as something that is not only outwardly constructed, manufactured, but also perhaps as something that, like spectacles, can potentially be put on and cast off under certain conditions in an attempt to alter one's perspective, creating opportunities for the gender play that Butler is interested in. Woolf seems to be suggesting here that, to some extent, sexual difference and sex in general is a kind of socially mandatory optical illusion, actually changing the true color or nature of reality. For, if Woolf is read as suggesting that a sexed point of view is little more than the result of a distorted optical filter assigned at birth, then she seems also to be making a statement about the arbitrariness of gender distinctions in general. In other words, adopting an understanding that sexed disposition or behavior is largely socially imposed, and is a result of the individual being trained to see the world in a particular manner, then it seems that Woolf is suggesting that there may be very little of sex or gender that is what we might think of as "natural" or inherent, even if one is taught to believe it is so.

"A Society" allows Woolf's engagement in gender play by "puting on the spectacles of masculinity" to show the constructed nature of such a viewpoint. Looking at the short story as a precursor to Woolf's later representation of a blinkered masculine perspective, Woolf is taking on some element of what she sees as a flaw of male authorship. Male writers, she claims, tend to represent women as relational or an embodiment of some gender-specific idealization rather than as multidimensional people who have an existence outside of their function of praising men. In *A Room of One's Own,* shortly after the paragraph describing the spectacles of sex, Woolf actually summarizes the very project which she sets out to accomplish in "A Society." To understand the misrepresentation of women in literature, men could imagine "that men were only represented in literature as the lovers of women, and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers dreamers; how few parts in the plays of Shakespeare could be allotted to them; how literature would

suffer!" (83). Here, Woolf again places men in the position long held by women, acknowledging the usefulness of gender play and reversal that she employs earlier in "A Society." Thus, it seems that Woolf herself recognizes the political implications of the gender parody that Butler would later champion, exaggerating gender binaries in order to question and potentially denaturalize assumptions about the capabilities of the sexes.

In *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf uses drag and gender parody again to illustrate this point by introducing the character of "Judith Shakespeare," William's imaginary twin sister, who, although equally talented, is barred from achieving the same success as William actually did (in fact killing herself) simply because she is a woman. It is interesting to think of this example also as an instance of stylistic or rhetorical drag, although this time one in which the (very brilliant, very much revered) male mind is placed into a female persona. The tension between the trajectory of "Judith's" life, (who is essentially William in a differently sexed body) and the very different trajectory of William's career and influence has the effect of challenging commonly accepted notions about male and female ability as well as representation. Observing, adopting, and internalizing the characteristics of the sexes deemed "appropriate" to society speaks to Butler's theory of performativity, but perhaps with an emphasis on the role of the spectator rather than the spectacle itself. While in "Phyllis and Rosamond" Woolf takes the reader deep into the psyches of those actively constructing gendered identities, in "A Society" and "A Room of One's Own" Woolf delves into what it means to perceive the identity of a perceived "other" from a position which is also acting and reacting to a particular notion of selfhood.

Woolf's critique is, of course, facilitated by the fact that she is an openly female writer practicing an exaggerated version of masculine writing, not unlike Butler's drag performers who

make audiences aware of the performative nature of gender identity via some combination of exaggerated "naturally" feminine or male behaviors and the fact that the performer's assumed sex is apparently other than the persona which they are performing. According to Butler, by drawing an audience's attention to overstated significations of gender in someone who is apparently actually of a different gender, drag has the possibility of emphasizing the performative nature of even normative gender acts or expressions:

> What is "performed" in drag is of course, the sign of gender, a sign which is not the same as the body that it figures, but that cannot be read without it. The sign, understood as a gender imperative—"girl!"—reads less as an assignment than as a command and, as such, produces its own insubordinations. The hyperbolic conformity to the command can reveal the hyperbolic status of the norm itself (*Bodies that Matter* 237).

In the context of "A Society," the moments in which Woolf adopts an exaggeratedly male-centric view of women offer what Butler calls "signs," suggesting that the perspective from which the story is being written is meant to be understood as that of a male author. These sorts of exaggerated signifiers (such as the insistence that the women will set to praising men "as usual"), are particularly easy to comprehend as mimetic and yet a critique of masculine writing due to an awareness that the author of the piece actually is a woman. In other words, because these signs apparently differ from the authorial identity they are meant to signify, Woolf finds a way to critique particular tendencies of the very people whom she mimics (male authors) by hyperbolizing the kind of assumptions they might make. As Butler helps us to see, this exaggeration of a masculine behavior, this hyperbolic performance of male authority, has the potential to shed light on the sort of ridiculous nature of what is considered to be a "normal" portrayal of women in the literary sphere. For example, although a reader might not notice problematic portrayals of women in a male-authored novel that only presents women as love interests and mothers of men, Woolf uncovers, mocks, and, in doing so, questions the sort of

assumptions that underlie portrayals of women that are less apparently ridiculous, that may go undetected or unquestioned.

This principle can be seen in the particular preoccupations that Woolf attributes to the women, even prior to the commencement of their comical routine male-worship, all centering around stereotypical male notions of what it is that women must always be feeling or thinking. Some women are described as "gazing across the street into windows of a milliner's shop where the light still shone brightly upon scarlet feathers and golden slippers," while other women are "idly occupied in building little towers of sugar upon the edge of the tea tray" (Woolf, "A Society" 118). Woolf points to stereotypes of women as vainly preoccupied with fashion, or otherwise focused only on the "idle" feminine pastime of tea-taking. Indeed, because women are either incapable of or not allowed to construct anything substantial in reality, they build tiny structures of sugar as they wait to wax poetic about men.

Such descriptions of women as captivated by material, consumer or luxury goods paint a picture of the feminine as completely disassociated from the intellectual realm, engaged completely with superficial objects. Stylistically, Woolf chooses to describe the women in such a way that they appear as almost infantile, mesmerized by the allure of the glittering accessories in shop windows. On this note, Woolf also seems to be emphasizing the preoccupation of women as consumers with sight and appearances; she describes the women as looking at objects that are meant to be used as external ornamentation. The world of the feminine is equated with narcissism, outer ornamentation and sensual pleasure as opposed to inward reflection and intellectual pursuit. It is almost impossible to conceive of this description as anything but a critical parody of male writing, particularly in light of the fact that Woolf believed men incapable of accurately depicting women. Moreover, in the larger context of the piece as a rebuttal to the

notion that women are not intellectually gifted, a story which takes these stereotypes as a point of departure only to invert assumptions made by Affable Hawk, the apparent vanity or frivolity of the women's occupations at the start of the story appears significant as an audience's first look into the women's world.

The idea that female life revolves around men and masculinity is apparent as the narrator describes Poll as constantly distressed by her dim romantic prospects caused by her lack of beauty, stating that she "must have been thinking, while we praised men, that not one of them would ever wish to marry her" (118). It is as if Poll is so all-consumingly obsessed with male judgment that she simply cannot carry on a conversation with other women without her mind straying to this topic. Furthermore, the fact that the narrator guesses this source of insecurity suggests that women can understand each other only by using men as a point of reference, an ultimate source of knowledge even concerning the topic of their own consciousnesses. This sense that these young women have based their knowledge of other women on the humorously misguided opinions of men, particularly in terms of intellectual and creative capacity, persists throughout the piece. After one girl reads from a book of poetry which turns out to contain "verbose, sentimental foolery" rather than anything of great intellectual value or poetic interest, another girl proclaims that it "must have been written by a woman" (119).

Woolf continues her cultural critique by parodying not only the limits of gendered literary judgments, but also the idealistic moral standards to which women are held. Woolf uses exaggeration and hyperbole to mock the notion of feminine chastity and virginity as something that is of utmost importance to young ladies, essential to their livelihood and value as individuals. After returning from Oxbridge, Castalia, in the midst of delivering her report to the other girls, very casually admits to being pregnant. Suddenly realizing the weight of her

situation, she whoops and yells, "Chastity! Chastity! Where's my chastity!" before asking for a scent bottle, comically shocked at the horror of her own impurity (123). Satiric in its invocation and repetition of "chastity," this episode questions Chastity as the virtuous lifeblood of womankind, a god to which Castalia is praying, a precursor to significant moments in Woolf's later works. The scene seems to speak directly to the scene of the protagonist's mysterious and phantasmagoric sex change in *Orlando* (the subject of the second half of my project) in which the Lady of Purity, Lady of Chastity, and Lady of Modesty all appear in to facilitate Orlando's change of sex by embodying the essential qualities of womanhood. This moment too is clearly parodic: characteristics that a proper and decent young lady ought to have are exaggerated to the point that they take on their own divine personhood, magically descending from the heavens when Orlando switches sexes.

The "chastity" passages, when read together, clearly mock both the idea that such feminine "virtues" are in any sense inherent to women (as if each baby girl were visited by the ladies Purity, Chastity, and Modesty upon birth), and the notion that keeping one's Chastity should be the aim of every young lady's life. Suggesting that Castalia had been too preoccupied with the "masculine" business of learning even to notice her fall from grace, the narrator anxiously asks if she has broken their "vow" of abstinence at which point Castalia very suddenly and dramatically laments her treachery to the nature of her sex. Woolf's narrator reminds Castalia (and, in turn, the reader) of the socially conditioned imperatives (such as virginity) that the girls appear to momentarily abandon. There is, in fact, strife among the group as to the value of Chastity and whether it has a place in their new society. Poll states that "chastity is nothing but ignorance- a most discreditable state of mind," before suggesting that only the impure should be allowed into the group, much to the dismay of the other women, who Woolf describes as

refusing this suggestions “violently” ("A Society" 124). Interestingly, Woolf rejects a vision for a future society of women which is either wholeheartedly for or against Chastity, choosing not completely to disavow the concept. Instead, the question of Chastity becomes too contentious for the women, and Helen suggests that no one, except those in love, should be able to speak either of Chastity or its absence.

Instead, it seems that the value of Chastity is to be left up to individual women. The women's society refuses to adhere to a system which honors the same binary between the “pure woman” and the “impure woman” as did the society in which they grew up. Some of the women’s lingering attachment to the significance of Chastity can be seen as indicative of the internalization of their own status and worth in a male-run society. Although they are no longer defined by the patriarchal constraints that once required them to be Chaste and virginal in order to uphold their honor and market value for marriage, both Castalia’s suddenly (and very stereotypically feminine) distressed fainting spell and the initial violent resistance of the other women to her example illustrate that the values patriarchal society has impressed upon them cannot easily be shaken off. Indeed, Woolf portrays the misogynistic value system under which the women had once lived as a part of the women’s identities, something that perseveres even as their social situation shifts. The women's eventual decision not to impose a standard of Chastity is particularly interesting in connection with the appearance of Lady Chastity in *Orlando* in the sense that it is presented as an integral part of the process of becoming a woman and being recognized as a woman in society. In this way, by casting off the confines of "chaste" or "unchaste," the women in *A Society* can be seen to be, in some sense, masculinizing or at least de-gendering themselves so that they may move on with the business of creating a better world.

It would be, I think, misguided to think that Woolf is actually calling for an Orlando-esque sex change so that women may enter the intellectual and political realm. Rather, Woolf's focus here centers more on the recognition of the arbitrary constraints of gender and traditionally gendered qualities, contributing to the idea that we must eschew these outdated and meaningless notions in order to move forward. Moreover, by performing these queering and parodic tasks which upset stable ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman, Woolf seems to be pointing to a perceived fluidity and malleability of gender. If men and women can easily be depicted as possessing traits which are usually considered “inherent” to the opposite gender, or lacking traits which are assumed to be natural to their assigned gender, then Woolf insists that gender distinctions are arbitrary, and that “masculine” and “feminine” (indeed, “man” and “woman”) are simply defined by a number of socially determined traits. One easily may exhibit a number of traits from either side, regardless of one's recognized sexual or gender identity. Thus, Woolf here presents an androgyny that argues not so much for a physical transformation, but a psychic meditation that is reminiscent of Woolf's slaughter of the ever lurking presence of the idealized woman who is embodied by the "Angel in the House," representing domestic love, attachment, and affect. Thus, the focus seems not to be on the question of the nature of "man," "woman," or a mysterious something else, but rather on how these identities are defined, imposed and enforced, and, moreover, the effect of this imposition upon both society and individual bodies.

Woolf plays at placing the women in the position of men in order to offer a critique not only of misogynistic male intellectual assumptions about women, but also essentialist notions about how men and women differ from one another. Her parodic reversal of sex roles quite explicitly serves to address and question the validity of stereotypes about the competence of the sexes. She heightens the arbitrariness of such preconceptions by using female characters as the

mouthpieces for traditionally "masculine" dialogue. In her analysis of the story, Susan Dick writes:

> the premise on which Woolf bases her story is that these young women know as little about the social, political, and artistic achievements of men as most men, to judge from Arnold Bennett and Desmond MacCarthy, know about those of women. They are just beginning to realize that their assumptions are those of the patriarchal society they have grown up in; the society they now create among themselves will both expose those assumptions and challenge them" (56).

Woolf puts women in the position of the questioner, the authority, conveying the absurdity of Hawk and Bennett's questions and declarations about women. The society that Woolf creates in "A Society" is one very much of and for women in the same sense that Woolf's own educational and cultural climate was dictated by men.

The reversal goes a step beyond a reclaiming of men's media of expression as the women in the society challenge the systems and practices instituted and championed by men, including the written word. Castalia traces the women's frustrations back to literacy: "If we hadn't learned to read...we might still have been bearing children in ignorance and that I believe was the happiest life after all" (128). Notably, the women appear to have no viable "way out" of their oppression, as the only alternative to engaging with the sexist writings of men is to occupy another oppressed position by "bearing children in ignorance," which, ironically, is a potentially happier position. Several years later, Castalia echoes this refusal of language when she worries that her young daughter, having recently learned to read, will fall victim to the judgments of a patriarchal literary world, to which the narrator replies that once "she knows how to read there's only one thing you can teach her to believe in- and that is herself"(130). This desire for illiteracy is of course humorous and ironic but, more than that, another moment where Woolf uses hyperbole to make a point; this time, she calls for a re-examination of the taken-for-granted power structures embedded within language and literature. Woolf's parody serves the larger

purpose of recognizing both the power of language (to the overwhelming advantage of those who control it) and the need to critique even those modes of discourse that have become most naturalized, that seem the most innate or inevitable.

In both Butler and Woolf's writing, drag and gender parody serve to de-naturalize identity by enacting or performing (often exaggerated) elements of the very identities which they conceive of as constructed. This approach to challenging gender conventions, exemplified by both authors, has particularly interesting implications for what it means to trouble notions of gender essentialism. What Butler argues and Woolf anticipates is that within the socially constructed nature of gender, there are sites of agency to be found, opportunities to disturb and queer expected patterns and behaviors by adopting, rejecting, or parodically exaggerating expected gender behaviors. Demonstrating a site for hope and change in a bleak situation, the authors illustrate a method of subversion by which it is possible to question and challenge an oppressive system from a place inside of that system, using the language and symbolism of the system in unexpected ways and for a different purpose. In creating these spaces of progress, Woolf and Butler both exemplify a type of activism that rests upon a notion of identity that resists strict or all-encompassing categorization of the self. Neither attempts to unearth what exactly (if anything) lies beneath socially imposed roles and identifications. Rather, by highlighting the effort that goes into manufacturing identities considered natural, both authors encourage readers critically to examine and rethink the assumptions these assumptions (literary, political, social, or otherwise) they are making about the gendered identities of others as well as of themselves.

Chapter 2: Orlando and Making "Bodies That Matter"

Introduction

...[S]ociety is everything and society is nothing. Society is the most powerful concoction in the world and society has no existence whatsoever. Such monsters the poets and the novelists alone can deal with... (Woolf, *Orlando* 194).

Woolf's novel *Orlando* may chiefly be understood as a work of fantasy in the sense that it demands an immense suspension of disbelief, diverging from what one might consider the "laws" of nature. Because Woolf creates a world in which a man or woman may live for centuries and only age by several years, and since Orlando's story relies heavily on the mystical experiences of her bodily transformation from male to female, the novel is so wildly phantasmagorical, so dreamlike and dislocated from what is thought of as the "real" or the ordinary, that it is difficult for some critical readers to understand the proceedings of the novel as anything more than elements of a fanciful fairytale, wistfully pondering a world (unlike our own) in which it is possible to move beyond the realm of sexual boundaries and exist as a multi-sexed (or completely androgynous) entity. In her essay "Fact, Fiction, and Metafiction: Blurred Gen(d)res in 'Orlando' and 'A Room of One's Own,'" Beth Bohem attributes the "undervalued and critically neglected" role of *Orlando* in academia to its "whimsical" nature: "Woolf's critics have...dismissed her fantastic biography of a protagonist who changes gender in the middle of a 500-year lifespan as a frivolous read, a joyful love letter to Vita Sackville-West," or "as too eccentric to discuss alongside Woolf's more serious and analytical novels" (192).[3]

In her *Writer's Diary,* composed while penning Orlando, Woolf herself questions the novel's significance as a serious literary work, because it is too "freakish and unequal," despite the fact that she thinks it "very brilliant now and then." Because of this fantastic "freakishness,"

[3] Among scholars who dismiss *Orlando* on in terms of genre or tone, Bohem cites Mitchell Leaska, who failed to include the book in a comprehensive literary study of Woolf's novels because it is too "incongruous," and Jane Marcus, who almost completely excludes *Orlando* from her feminist analyses of Woolf's work.

Woolf anticipates an evaluation of the piece as a whole as "[n]ot, I think, 'important' among my works. L[eonard] says a satire" (125). The quotes around the word "important" signifies Woolf's anticipation that because of its detachment from a realist manner of representation, *Orlando* will ultimately be dismissed by readers. Indeed, she refers to the novel as "mere child's play" (146), something that she claims has taught her "continuity and narrative and how to keep realities at bay...to give things their caricature value" (134). On this note of unreality, Woolf posits that *Orlando* began "as a joke" that became unintentionally serious, growing "rather too long" for her liking.

Even as Woolf acknowledges that her work is likely to be received as playfully unimportant, she claims that *Orlando* (very appropriately) cannot be meaningfully placed within a binary composed of either "serious" or "playful" writing. Woolf sees the novel as likely to elude attention and analysis precisely because of this ambiguous position, describing the book as "too long to be a joke, and too frivolous for a serious book" (Woolf, *Writer's Diary* 122), and "half laughing, half serious" (118). Indeed, *Orlando's* outlandish refusal to conform fully either to the serious, the "real," or to the fantastic is mirrored by the piece's content; Orlando's character is inspired by Vita Sackville-West, a very real person with whom Woolf shared an intense relationship. Woolf expressed an awareness of these dual influences on her writing of the novel: "the balance between truth and fantasy must be careful. It is based on Vita, Violet Trefusis, Lord Lascelles, Knole, etc." (115). The novel is, at its very core, a negotiation between the undeniably real and the fantastic.[4] This sentiment is amplified by Woolf's formal presentation of the book as a "biography" in which the laws of time are narrated by an unreliable biographer

[4] *In Fact and Fantasy in Orlando: Virginia Woolf's Manuscript Revisions,* Charles G. Hoffman details how, in the original manuscript of *Orlando*, specific dates are included which correspond with particular events in the lives of Vita Sackville-West's ancestors, emphasizing the novel's true engagement with the lived history of Vita's family.

who constantly appeals to the notion of a supreme (and yet, to the reader, glaringly impossible)Truth.

Blurring distinctions between the true and the fantastic, both structurally and in terms of plot, Woolf satirizes not only the genre of biography, but also the idea of any tangible Truth, an objectively singular reality with regard to any human experience, including, specifically, experiences of sex and sexuality. In his book *Libidinal Currents*, Joseph Allen Boone writes on the relevance of challenging accepted or "real" forms of sex and sexuality through fantasy in order to test the artificial boundaries between what we have been told is real or valid and the experiences or feelings which these imposed standards have disallowed:

> I want to suggest that the longing to yield to a space in which subject meets subject in terms other than those accruing to the rhetoric of power-- whether expressed in the interchanges that form from the substance of sexual fantasy or fictional narrative-- is not an exercise in self-deluded mysticism or nostalgic transcendentalism. Rather, as soon as such intersubjective desires enter the imagination, they take on a phenomenological reality, becoming a materially embodied (which is to say a real) component of the individual's emotional, psychic, and somatic life. And this reality belies the myth of power's hegemony as, in fact, a myth (2).

Here, Boone underscores the role of fantasy in re-thinking sex as something neither passive nor inconsequential, but something formative in shaping our understanding of reality as well as the capacity to imagine new ways of defining that reality. It is, I will argue, precisely Woolf's ability to use fantasy in order to question reality that makes *Orlando* so important to consider in terms of theories of sex, gender, and sexuality. Rather than degrading it or relegating it to a secondary role, *Orlando's* particular ability to complicate and challenge notions about sex and sexuality held by even the most liberal-minded critical readers and theorists is not only what makes the novel so troublesome, but also so powerful and important.

In this chapter, I aim primarily to put *Orlando* in conversation with Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, a book dealing with the material constructedness of sexed bodies, in order to

explore the dynamics of what it means for Orlando to "become" a sex, and possibly shed light upon the dark spaces of sexual ambiguity that Woolf presents. First, I will take a moment to lay out the conceptual framework of my analysis, and clearly define my objective in this part of my project. In her text, Butler highlights the interdependence and interconnectedness of sex and gender as categories that, for her purposes, cannot be strictly differentiated from one another. Butler links not only gender, but also the condition of inhabiting or "having" a sex, to her theory of performativity. "Consider first that sexual difference is often invoked as an issue of material differences. Sexual difference, however, is never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way marked and formed by discursive practices" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 1). In other words, Butler suggests that the category of sex, perhaps most commonly understood as that which is biologically stable and undeniable "beneath" the complexities of gender (with the exception of surgical and/or hormonal intervention), is in itself an intricate and formative process which is structured, identified, and interpreted by observing and perpetuating the boundaries of the identities and regulations that are provided by existing power structures. By putting Butler's theories regarding sex and gender performativity in dialogue with some key moments and themes in *Orlando*, I hope to uncover and investigate instances where Woolf uses the phantasmagorical in order to express ideas about how sex, gender, and sexuality apply to the non-fictional realm of what it means to be a sexed and gendered person in everyday life. I want to put *Orlando* and *Bodies That Matter* in conversation with one another in order to highlight what it means to have an identity, to **be** a sex or gender, ultimately suggesting that categories and identities that are often taken for granted as true or supremely "real," such as that of biological sex or perhaps sexuality, are, in many ways, actually phantasmagorical in and of themselves,

stories that societies and individuals perpetuate and use to create our own characters: what Butler calls "bodies that matter."

Having introduced ideas regarding the outward performance of a specific gendered ideal in my first chapter, I turn now to think about how *Orlando* explores issues of sex and embodiment along with gender and gender performativity. Although (very significantly)Woolf never directly describes or explains the "true" or "real" state of Orlando's body, the question of materiality and bodies nonetheless plays a pivotal role in the novel. During the scene of the transformation when her protagonist is changed from a man into a woman, Woolf coyly acknowledges the mystery shrouding Orlando's anatomy, as, immediately after the change "Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably to his bath" (*Orlando* 138). Moments after Woolf's teasingly anti-climactic reference to Orlando's inspection of his/her body, the biographer announces that Orlando has become a woman, subverting the expectation that a change of sex should necessarily imply a concretely changed body. Much of the scene of sexual transition plays with this idea of the unseen body, as the satiric embodiments of "Truth, Modesty, and Chastity" dare not glance at Orlando's anatomy, "waving their draperies over their heads, as if to shut out something they dare not look upon," later throwing "a garment like a towel at the naked form" so that Orlando may cover her body (137-8).Indeed, the idea of material sex stands in opposition to the fluid and elusive sexual currents that reside underneath the novel's surface. Joseph Boone quotes psychologist Muriel Dimen to describe how "'sexuality rests between things, it borders psyche and society, culture and nature, conscious and unconscious, self and other. Its variety makes it intrinsically ambiguous'"(2). I argue, then, that Woolf's creation of a narrative which simultaneously foregrounds sex while emphasizing its intangible quality makes

Orlando something more than an "otherworldly" fantasy or wishful attempt somehow to "transcend" sex and sexuality, offering an exposition of sex as something eternally ambiguous even as it pervades all spheres of life.

1. Orlando and the Heterosexual Matrix

The relationship between sexual identity and sexuality plays a prominent role throughout *Orlando*, becoming particularly important during moments in which the sexual identity of potential romantic partners comes into question. Specifically, Woolf pays great attention to construction and maintenance of heterosexual desire, as well the chaotic conditions under which it seems always to be on the brink of failure. In this way, although homosexuality and other forms of sexuality are never explicitly mentioned (such categories seem to be beyond Orlando's understanding of sexual desire as strictly heterosexual), these moments in which heterosexuality breaks down or threatens to break down serve to cast light upon not only the mythical nature of a natural heterosexuality, but also the queer, deviant sorts of desires that threaten this standard. As Joseph Boone puts it, "any elucidation on the problem of heterosexual relations-- the overt contents of the majority of..fictions of sexuality-- is not only necessary, but also necessarily an analysis of homosexuality as heterosexuality's inevitable other" (15). This kind of panicked and emotionally-charged confusion first takes place while Orlando is still a young man, when he sees his eventual lover, Sasha, for the first time.

> ...[H]e beheld, coming from the pavilion of the Muscovite Embassy, a figure, which, whether boy's or woman's, for the loose tunic and trousers of the Russian fashion served to disguise the sex, filled him with the highest curiosity. The person whatever the name or sex, was about middle height, very slenderly fashioned, and dressed entirely in oyster-couloured velvet, trimmed with some unfamiliar greenish-coloured fur. But these details were obscured by the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from the whole person (Woolf, *Orlando* 37).

Woolf's description of Sasha's appearance is most notable for the fact that she is initially described as sexually androgynous, something which soon proves stressful to Orlando as his

attraction to her is instant. At first glance, the narrator is already questioning the sex of the mysterious figure, foregrounding Sasha's androgynous appearance, while simultaneously suggesting that the figure's sensuality eclipses the question of sex. In fact, the question of sex is nonchalantly listed, alongside the details of the clothes which cover Sasha's frame, as something ultimately overlooked, only one of those small details subordinate to her presence. In this way, Sasha's introduction entails a foregrounding of sex, a curious fascination with some hidden truth, and, simultaneously, an insistence that sex is not all-encompassing: it is no more significant than the color or trimming of a particular piece of clothing. Moreover, while Orlando and the narrator are puzzling over questions of sex, they invoke a definition that reaches far beyond anatomy or biology. Rather, the narration rests on the assumption that an individual outwardly "presents" as the sex to which he or she is born or assigned, complicating the distinctions between inner and outer selves, sex and gender, and sex, gender, and appearance. The unsteady distinctions between these realms persist as Orlando consistently questions the sex of others. Later in the story, multiple characters, such as Orlando and the Archduke Harry/Archduchess Harriet, sport clothes that seem to signify to others that they are members of the sex opposite to their "real" identities. Although the ambiguity of Sasha's sex is first presented as a point of intrigue, something which confounds and entices Orlando, it soon becomes a site of incredible uncertainty and fear. Sasha may be a man; any love between them would be unthinkable for its deviation from a institutionalized heterosexual model, which reinforces the idea that true, valid, and recognized desire can only exist between those of the so-called "opposite" sexes.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler introduces the concept of the "heterosexual matrix" in relation to compulsory heterosexuality[5] as central to the formation and maintenance of sexed and gendered identities. Butler explains the heterosexual matrix as an ideologically ingrained structure, perpetuating an understanding that the only valid form of sexual desire exists between a "man" and a "woman:" "the repressive law effectively produces heterosexuality...as a sanction and, most pertinently, as a law of discourse, distinguishing the speakable from the unspeakable, the legitimate from the illegitimate" (*Gender Trouble* 65).Before exploring this theory and how it relates to *Orlando*, I first want to use Butler's language to underscore an understanding of gender as a fluidly defined entity, something that "can denote a unity of experience, of sex, gender, and desire." Butler uses the term gender here to signify a complex and changing network of feelings, anatomies, and behaviors which contribute to the notion of a specifically (and cohesively) sexed and gendered individual. In describing the interrelatedness of sex, gender, and desire as it exists within the context of a heterosexual matrix, Butler posits:

> [t]he internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality. That institutionalized heterosexuality both requires and produces the univocity of each of the gendered terms that constitute the limit of gendered possibilities within an oppositional, binary gender system. This conception of gender presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire (22).

Heterosexual desire according to Butler is integral to the formation and legitimization of strictly defined and opposed sexual identities. In this system, sex and gender (which are presumed to be linked) are seen as the underlying "cause" or motivation of a desire, specifically for the "opposite" sex. The notion that there are two "opposite" sexes which must desire one another requires an identification with a specific sex or gender and an explicit rejection of the other,

[5] A term coined by Adrienne Rich in her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980): refers to the systematic oppression of women under a society dominated by obligatory, institutionalized heterosexuality. The term was developed by other prominent Second Wave feminist theorist like Catharine MacKinnon, Luce Irigaray, and Gayle Rubin.

demanding a coherence of identity and desire within accepted boundaries of heterosexuality and an adherence to a strictly binary conception of sex and gender. All types of desire and identities that fall outside of this categorical framework are invalidated. In Orlando's world, to love a male Sasha is completely unthinkable, outside of the realm of possibility or identity. In other words, compulsory heterosexuality insists that everyone inhabits a specifically sexed category, and that, by virtue of occupying that role, one necessarily desires only members of the "oppositely" sexed group. Conversely and yet simultaneously, Butler's understanding of compulsory sexuality also suggests that desire is considered causal of sex; a desire of the "opposite" sex both necessitates that there be two distinct sexes, and that anyone capable of desire for one sex must actually belong to the other, or otherwise embody an incomprehensible kind of non- identity.

Keeping this understanding of a heterosexuality in which sex both creates and is created by desire in mind, Butler's analysis of compulsory heterosexuality supports a reading of Orlando's strange sensations and visceral reaction to being confronted with a person whose presence threatens the integrity of the gender binary as a challenge to Woolf's protagonist's place within the heterosexual matrix. Initially, Orlando is rendered dumbstruck; when confronted with Sasha's androgynous figure, Orlando's own body becomes ecstatically disarrayed. He loses the ability to identify and differentiate between the senses through which he perceives Sasha's presence: "He called her a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald, and a fox in the snow all in the space of three seconds; he did not know whether he had heard her, tasted her, seen her, or all three together" (Woolf, *Orlando* 37). This moment of perceptual confusion and bodily estrangement can be interpreted as a side-effect of Orlando being for the first time faced with the possibility of attraction to someone for whom his desire could render Orlando essentially a non-being, recalling Butler's account of an exclusionary sexual matrix. This moment of crisis, of

bodily unintelligibility, suggests that even a potential violation of the heterosexual matrix, the mere possibility of rejecting a rational identity (in this case, entertaining an attraction to someone apparently not a woman), points to dissolution of self-identity or the ability to locate and comprehend an embodied self.

Orlando's desperate worries before realizing that Sasha is a woman also demonstrate an understanding of sex and desire based on a model of compulsory heterosexuality:

> When the boy, for alas, a boy it must be- no woman could skate with such speed and vigour- swept almost on tiptoe past him, Orlando was ready to tear his hair with vexation that the person was of his own sex, and thus all embraces were out of the question. Legs, hands, carriage, were a boy's, but no boy ever had a mouth like that; no boy had those breasts; no boy had those eyes which looked as if they had been fished from the bottom of the sea (38).

Orlando here acknowledges that no meaningful romantic interaction is possible with Sasha if her "person was of his own sex." It seems simple to explain Orlando's overwhelming frustration at the idea of Sasha being a man simply because homosexual activities would likely not be tolerated, however, I think that the passage actually goes further in suggesting a suspension of desire. Describing Sasha, Woolf notably explores different modes of representing sexual ambiguity; at the beginning of the passage, Orlando relies on a binary way of understanding Sasha, claiming that "no woman could skate" as Sasha does. Woolf then moves on linguistically to entertain the possibility of a dual sexual identity, by describing Sasha (at this point presumably a man: "legs, hands, carriage, were a boy's") as possessing decidedly female traits ("no boy ever had a mouth like that; no boy had those breasts...those eyes"). Orlando significantly does not here ruminate on some prohibited desire to be with a male Sasha, does not pause to lament that then he could not touch Sasha'a masculine hands or legs, but simply dismisses the possibility of feelings of desire for Sasha as a man, even one who is theoretically identical to the woman he feels an intense adoration for moments later, after her sex is "revealed." In this sense, a reader

may begin to observe that not only does Orlando inhabit a society that is founded on adherence to a heterosexual matrix that closely resembles Butler's account, but also that Orlando himself acts as an embodiment of this understanding of sex and sexuality.

In fact, Orlando only allows himself to truly desire Sasha both physically and emotionally once he realizes that she is a woman, and thus when desiring her becomes feasible or imaginable. "She was a woman. Orlando stared; trembled; turned hot; turned cold; longed to hurl himself through the summer air; to crush acorns beneath his feet; to toss his arms with the beech trees and the oaks. As it was, he drew his lips up over his small white teeth; opened them perhaps half an inch as if to bite and shut them as if he had bitten" (38). Orlando begins immediately to show more recognizable, physical signs (turning hot, trembling in desire) of longing and lust after he learns that Sasha is a suitable object of his passions. Woolf describes Orlando's sentiments following his realization as highly explosive, an involuntary switching from a state of extreme heat to extreme cold, a desire to move his body in sudden and forceful movements. Orlando's consciousness turns from idle and cautious observation to sudden and unbridled activity. It is in this instant of categorization in which Orlando suddenly becomes capable of really experiencing and understanding his own desire, as if, as a male, he is bodily programmed only to experience attraction to those whom he is certain are not of his sex. Once Sasha is identified as a woman, Orlando starts to have very specific feelings and reactions that are rooted primarily in the body or in a desire to engage with his body. Although he is overwhelmed, as he was before, by sensation, this is a sensation that Orlando can make sense of, that has a name: desire. Far from the mess of mismatched senses that estranged Orlando from his own body moments before, Orlando now truly inhabits his own body; desire realigns Orlando with his body and reaffirms his identity.

Arguably, because Orlando recognizes physical characteristics that he classifies as belonging to a boy, and because it is Sasha's lack of evident gender that so enraptures him, his love of Sasha after the fact still qualifies as a potentially queer one. For, indeed, Orlando now feels free to love the legs, hands, carriage, and movements that he once described as chiefly masculine areas, as obviously signifying manhood. Despite this fact, any potential queerness or deviance from a heteronormative model of desire is now effectively erased in Orlando's mind, legitimated by the assertion that "underneath it all" Sasha is actually a woman, through and through. It is this faith, this belief in a core and stable female body that further affirms Sasha's identity as a woman, and, reciprocally, allows Orlando to define himself as Sasha's opposite, a man. [6]

A mirroring of this first scene occurs much later in the novel, after Orlando has become a woman, and she meets the man to whom she will soon become engaged. The attraction and connection between the two is again, as with Sasha, instantaneous; after almost trampling Orlando where she lies in a forest, Shel stops his horse to assist her, and they become engaged to marry only "a few minutes later" (250). This passage is particularly interesting and seems undeniably mocking in the context of Orlando's sudden emotional distress at being an unmarried woman directly before encountering Shel. "'Everyone is mated except myself'...'Whereas I, who am mistress of it all, Orlando thought, glancing as she passed at the innumerable emblazoned windows of the hall, 'am single, am mateless, am alone'" (246). Woolf pokes fun at the expectation of a heteronormative society that single women should "naturally" be so distressed by their status as unmarried that they would decide to throw themselves beneath the hooves of a

[6]It is worth noting that the dominant discourse surrounding homosexuality and hermaphroditism during the era in which Woolf was writing included the ideas of "sexual inversion" and "psychic heremaphorditism," terms used by the likes of Freud, Weininger, and Havelock Ellis. These theories engage with the idea that the mind can exist at odds with the sex of the body, resulting in homosexual desire and potentially other traits associated with the opposite sex (Helt 2010). This view reflects an understanding of sexuality based on a rigid gender dichotomy.

horse, and wait for death to take them. Moreover, Woolf seems to be suggesting the ridiculousness of the very expectation that every woman should eventually meet a man and immediately feel towards him enough affection and devotion to become engaged moments later. The fact that Orlando should all at once and for the first time in the text feel some seemingly instinctual pain, some innate failure as a woman for not being married, and then immediately become engaged to the first male who crosses her path and swoops her up from the depths of despair parodies the notion of women's biological predisposition to mate as well as the idea that men and women should naturally find one another and feel an instant connection. In fact, Shel is the first character of the opposite sex to feature prominently in the narrative since Orlando himself was a man. Shel's biological sex seems to be the only real requirement; the only thing Woolf reveals to the reader about Shel before announcing the betrothal, is that Shel belongs to the opposite sex. Indeed, this occurs before Orlando even learns the name of her beloved. Woolf writes: "The morning after as they sat at breakfast, he told her his name. It was Marmaduke Bonthorp Shelmerdine, Esquire" to which Orlando replies "'I knew it!'" (250). That Orlando should ever guess such a long, convoluted name is in itself ridiculous, adding to the satirical edge of the couple's divinely sanctioned heterosexual love. Alas, all that Orlando and Shel really know about each other is their assumed sex by virtue of their appearance, and this, apparently, is enough.

Despite the suddenness of their meeting and less than a day's worth of courting, the narrator insists that the two have really come to know and fall in love with one another. Simply by virtue of being a man and woman who have agreed to enter a relationship, they understand each other on some innately spiritual level. "In fact, though their acquaintance had been so short, they had guessed, as always happens between two lovers, everything of importance about each

other in two seconds at the utmost, and it now remained only to fill in such unimportant details as what they were called; where they lived; and whether they were beggars or people of substance." Shortly after learning Shel's name, Orlando pronounces "I'm passionately in love with you," (251). Woolf's lengthy and sweeping descriptions of Orlando's interaction with nature and her innermost feelings for Sasha render her supposed passion for Shel a parody of what it means to watch a man and a woman fall in love. This irony is underscored by the fact that soon after Orlando declares her love, there is a moment in which the lovers come to doubt the sex of the other, as if the state of desire itself hinges primarily on the sex of one's love-object. The lovers' cries of "'You're a woman, Shel'!" and "'You're a man, Orlando!'" are followed quickly by "such a scene of protestation and demonstration" that never had before occurred "since the world began" (252). Woolf here explicitly subverts the accepted gender paradigm of the nineteenth century by allowing the couple to see their own sex in the other, casting doubt upon the validity of their desires and identities. Although Shel claims that he is "really" a man, and Orlando a woman, Woolf alludes to a comical determination to adhere to a "natural" rule of heterosexual desire by hinting at anxieties surrounding any other possible type of desire. Woolf presents marriage here as a farce, the formal corollary of a constructed heterosexuality that has been naturalized. Butler articulates the destabilizing value of such imitative representations of heterosexual relations, stating that such parodies work to "expose heterosexuality as an incessant and *panicked* imitation of its own naturalized idealization...that it 'knows' its own possibility of becoming undone; hence its compulsion to repeat" ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination" 314).

Shortly after their desire is validated by the force of a compulsory heterosexuality, Orlando finds that her affections for the man come to contribute to a sense of her own sex

identity. Thinking of her beloved and weeping with adoration, she realizes "'I am a woman,'...'a real woman, at last'" (Woolf, *Orlando* 253). Here, Woolf clearly illustrates a link between heterosexual desire and perceived sexual identity, as Orlando finds validation for her own precariously assumed femininity by virtue of desiring someone who is "proven" to be a man, positioning herself definitively in the opposite sex role. This assertion also illustrates fleetingly how, for Orlando, heterosexual love is a necessary pre-condition for possessing a sexual identity; before Orlando fell in love with a man she was not truly or completely a woman. To experience desire is to inhabit an embodied self, a subject and body "that matters."

2. Violating the Heterosexual Matrix: Non-Being and Loss of Identity

Although Virginia Woolf never clearly explains the reasons for the fear that compels Orlando to question the sex of his/her partners, in *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler outlines possible consequences of violating just such a sex binary that actively punishes and excludes those whose identities and desires do not fit neatly within the confines of a model of compulsory heterosexuality. Butler suggests that the stakes for people inhabiting these marginalized or unrecognized sexual statuses are incredibly high; to exist outside of categorical identities is, in some sense, to be denied any meaningful identity, and, in effect, not to exist at all.

> This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject (*Bodies That Matter* 3).

Here, Butler argues that, since sex identity is formed through the expression of heterosexual desires and performance of a specific "sex" or "gender," those who express desire that deviates from the norm are forced to inhabit a space of non-being. These individuals, failing to adhere to the rules that grant to specific bodies the status of "subjects," become incomprehensible and fail

to be recognized as "livable" bodies. The consequences of occupying these marginalized non-positions can reach far beyond the production of a social stigma or the ostracism to actually render certain people as non-people, beings who do not meet the qualifications of subjectivity, cannot become a "he," a "she," or even an "I." These non-beings, then, are robbed of both public recognition as viable subjects as well as the language with which to express their experiences. These are the bodies that do not matter, but necessarily exist as the negative space against which proper and meaningful identities are established, an embodiment of that which cannot be, reinforcing the very rule whereby they are excluded.

In discussing the sphere of the non-subject, the sexually unrepresentable, it is formally significant to note that it is in the moments when Orlando fails to regulate her sexual identity, for instance by dressing in a highly androgynous fashion, that she seems most to elude Woolf's comically inept biographer, to lose her status as a proper subject of representation. In fact, the biographer claims to have the most difficulty tracking the trajectory of her life precisely when the status of her sex is in question. These instances take place before Orlando is married or even is explicitly subjected to the confines of compulsory heterosexuality as a woman, during the transitional period sometime shortly before the Victorian era, after she allegedly changed sexes. The biographer laments this era of relative sexual fluidity in the life of his subject, stating that "to give an exact and particular account of Orlando's life at this time becomes more and more out of the question...we seem now to catch sight of her and then again lose it" (Woolf, *Orlando* 221). Shortly after this admission, the biographer observes that "[f]rom the probity of breeches she turned to the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally" (222). Here, Woolf ambiguously uses the term "love" to denote either (or both) that Orlando enjoyed "being" both sexes or romantically loving both sexes. The double-meaning contained within this term is

particularly telling; whether Orlando is finding romance with other women or is dressing up as a man is virtually irrelevant, for, according to the rules of a sex binary enforced by compulsory heterosexuality, they are truly one and the same. In these moments of sexual androgyny or ambiguity, when Orlando seems unaware of his/her duty to indulge only desires appropriate to one sex, the biographer has the most difficulty telling his subject's story. It is as if this state of unchecked or fluctuating androgyny directly challenges Orlando's status as a coherent person available or accessible to biographical notice. Additionally, it is worth noting that the biographer directly implicates the reader in confronting Orlando's alleged invisibility, using the word "we" to align the perspective of the audience with that of the biographer, suggesting that a public larger than just the biographer does, necessarily, have difficulty recognizing an androgynous Orlando as a subject; she has slipped through society's grasp.

Butler argues that an exploration of identity politics is incomplete without also searching beyond the boundaries of non-being; in fact, the realm of the proper subject is defined precisely against the domain of the abject, and the two opposing spheres necessitate and demarcate the borders of the other. Alongside performative and constitutive proclamations of valid sexual identities (for example, Orlando's sense that she has at last become a "real woman" of the Victorian era), meaningful transgressions of normative identity too are significant in outlining and potentially challenging the categories of identity and humanity. As Butler explains:

> [I]t will be as important to think about how and to what end bodies are constructed as is it will be to think about how and to what end bodies are not constructed, and, further, to ask how bodies which fail to materialize provide the necessary 'outside,' if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as the bodies that matter (*Bodies That Matter* 16).

Thus, Butler highlights the significance of noticing instances of a profound disidentification in order to explore the relations among that which is and is not culturally legible. Orlando's

character, then, illustrates, in different sections of the novel, both the "unreal" or illegible existence of being incapable of "materializing the norm," as well as the externally regulated process of inhabiting a legitimate sexual identity. Joseph Boone notes that Woolf proclaims it part of her project as a writer to explore "'the dark places of psychology,'" to go about "bringing into the realm of articulation and hence representation-" (and here he cites Freud) "'the most hidden recesses of the mind" (8). This method of unearthing the "dark" spaces of identity, the buried or hidden states of ambiguous existence, is exemplified by Woolf's exploration of Orlando's descent into states of apparent death or "non-being" when failing to adhere to the sexual standards of the age.

Using Butler's model of a heterosexual matrix which renders some beings "non-subjects," I want now to examine moments in which Orlando is described by either herself or others as something other than a living subject. The ambiguous nature of Orlando's sex leads to much debate, not only about whether she is a man or a woman, but also as to whether she is alive or dead, recognizable as a person at all, illustrating the social nature of becoming a sex and, in effect, becoming a person. Woolf first presents the issue of Orlando's potential status as a non-being shortly after it becomes known that she has changed sexes, and the courts have begun to question how they are legally to regard her.

> The chief charges against her were (1) that she was dead, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; (2) that she was a woman, which amounts to much the same thing; (3) that she was an English Duke who had married one Rosina Pepita, a dancer; and had had by her three sons, which now declaring their father was deceased, claimed that all his property descended to them....Thus, it was in a highly ambiguous condition, uncertain whether she was alive or dead, man or woman, Duke or nonentity, that she posted down to her county seat where, pending legal judgment, she had the Law's permission to reside in a state of incognito or incognita as the case might turn out to be (Woolf, *Orlando* 168)[7]

[7] It is significant to note that Orlando's aristocratic status both prompts the law to take notice and rule upon him/her, and grants her the privilege of remaining incognito/incognita.

Here, on a surface level, Woolf overtly critiques a patrilineal system of inheritance, noting that to be a woman is essentially to be as good as dead in terms of the inheritance of wealth and property, suggesting that women, too, can exist as a specific type of non-being, barred from enjoying the benefits of full personhood offered to men. I am more interested in unpacking the less apparent implications embedded within this passage, however, and unveiling potential criticisms of a society obsessed with establishing and policing a sexual binary. Before I specifically explore the issue of sexual being and non-being in this passage however, I want to begin by analyzing the judicial, apparently trial-like nature of the process whereby Orlando's sex is to be decided. The problem of determining Orlando's sex is relegated to the realm of the law; her status is neither regulated nor even particularly effected by her anatomy nor some personal decision to identify as a woman after years of being a man. Rather, the question of her identity (and whether she has one) is left to systems of power apart from Orlando's own body; sex identity is rooted wholly in the social discourse in which Orlando is immersed.

Butler interrogates this mutually reinforcing relationship between sexual identity and law by asking:

> how do we pursue the question of sexuality and the law where the law is not only that which represses sexuality, but a prohibition which generates sexuality, or at least compels its directionality?...Specifically, how does the capacity of the law to produce and constrain at once play itself out in securing for every body a sex, a sexed position within language, a sexed position which is in some sense presumed by any body who comes to speak as a subject, an "I," one who is constituted through the act of taking its sexed place within a language that insistently forces the question of sex? (*Bodies That Matter* 95).

Here, Butler offers an interpretation of the law as a complex system of power which, more than simply policing its subjects, generates particularly sexed subjects with particular desires. This is a continuous process which Woolf also appears interested in exposing and exploring in her description of the law's handling of the various "charges" surrounding Orlando's identity, using

language that suggests that sexual identity is, above all a legal matter rather than a personal or biological imperative.

Tellingly, before the proclamation of the courts, Orlando herself is uncertain of her own identity, unsure of whether she actually exists, deferring somewhat comically to the law as the source of supreme knowledge and ultimate truth. Thus, Orlando's sex is not only interpreted but also materialized and produced entirely as a product of the decisions made by authorities. At the same time that these courts and judges promise to uncover or reveal some undeniable, overarching truth about Orlando's sex, they are actually constructing their own truth, illuminating sexual identity as a process which creates and reinforces the very categories the law is citing, establishing authority and maintaining productive power in this way. In Orlando's case, Woolf mocks this process, highlighting the absurdity of appealing to an arbitrary law's all-encompassing authority to determine one's own sex by stressing Orlando's ignorance as to whether she should henceforth be recognized as "incognito" or "incognita" (it is also noteworthy that Woolf here focuses on Orlando's sex primarily as a facet of language). Butler describes the nature of this same phenomenon that Woolf critiques as one through which seemingly unfounded generative power is continuously wielded and reinforced by an unquestioned doctrine or authority:

> the judge who authorizes and installs the situation he names invariably cites the law he applies...And though it may appear that the binding power of his words is derived from the force of his will or from a prior authority, the opposite is true: it is through the citation of the law that the figure of the judge's "will" is produced and that the "priority" of textual authority is established (*Bodies That Matter* 225).

Thus, the law establishes its own authority by continuously referencing itself via "citation" even as it suggests that it refers to some pre-established standard of truth or reality. Woolf mocks this idea of "the judge who authorizes and installs the situation he names." The official "verdict" on Orlando's identity, after marriage to Shel, is announced in the form of "a legal document of some

very impressive sort, judging by the blobs of sealing wax, the ribbons, the oaths, and the signatures, which were all of the highest importance" (Woolf, *Orlando* 254). The apparent excessiveness of the ornamentation, signatures, and rituals adorning the document calls into the question the notion that all mandates of the law, even one so ridiculous as officially to determine one's true "sex," should be taken as the ultimate word of truth simply because they appear official. Along the lines of Butler's thinking, Woolf also seems to be suggesting that judges of sexual identity derive power from precedent rather than "reality," a sentiment that is echoed by the suggestion that signatures, ribbons, and sealing wax have, in themselves (all things "of the highest importance"), come to ratify some imagined authority of sex. These trappings of authority serve as the decisive markers of Orlando's sex, not the anatomy or physiology that one might traditionally associate with "male" or "female" bodies. In fact, Woolf seems to be positing that biology has minimal direct influence on one's sexual identity, illustrating and reinforcing Butler's assertion that the materiality of a sexed body is actually a result of highly symbolic markers, particularly authoritative discourse, rather than an originating from any "real" identity. In speaking of sex, Butler posits that it "is not the simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of these norms" (*Bodies That Matter* 2).

With these matrixes of law and power in mind, I want to move forward by looking at the ways in which Woolf explores the law's ability to produce "non-beings," a necessary erasure (and, I will suggest, a figurative execution) of those people whose lived experiences deviate from an accepted heterosexual model of sex, gender, and sexuality. Indeed, before any explicit mention of sex, the very first "charge" leveled against Orlando by the law is that she is no longer living. Moreover, although it is quite obvious to the reader that Orlando has not died, and it

would seem apparent that Orlando herself would be aware of such a fact, the narration suggests that Orlando in fact does not rule out the possibility that she is dead or simply non-existent. Thus, confusion and distress surrounding Orlando's seemingly impossible change, originating in law, dictates Orlando's own understanding of herself, emphasizing that those governed by prevalent rules of identity have, to a great extent, internalized the norms they presume to be implicit in nature. Orlando was once a man, and may now be a woman, something which the regulatory laws of sexual identity deem impossible, a state of being that cannot be accounted for. The fact that the "charges" against Orlando simultaneously suggest that he is a woman, married to a woman, and a father to three children even further deem Orlando's identity as an incomprehensible and illegitimate one in the eyes of society and the law. In fact, it becomes spectacularly unclear how Orlando is perceived to transgress the sexual binary; if Orlando is a father, then how could she possibly be categorized as a woman? Or, is Orlando actually a woman, and if so, then how could she be married to another woman (a clear violation of compulsory heterosexuality)?

When confronted with a sexual identity that does not make sense in the context of a strict binary, the immediate and logical objective of Orlando's society is to insist that he/she must in fact not actually exist or somehow have stopped existing the moment her identity became inconsistent and incoherent in terms of the heterosexual matrix. Notably, however, it is not the case that society simply decides to ignore Orlando after her alleged sex change (quite the contrary), to pretend she never existed in an attempt to uphold the illusion of a sexual binary. In fact, Orlando's transformation is widely equated with a much more embodied form of erasure: she is said to have died, and essentially is murdered in the imaginations of a general public that does not possess the tools to fathom her existence. Somewhat paradoxically, the very rumors and

superstitions which draw the most attention to Orlando as an individual are the same factors which simultaneously compel people to believe that she cannot exist. A figurative "killing" of Orlando follows her transition, suggesting the kind of determined violence and aggression that such nonentities may face simply by living. Woolf illustrates the threat that individuals such as Orlando pose within existing framework of reality, something that is dangerous to the extent that it cannot simply be ignored, but actively eliminated or destroyed.

These "charges" leveled against Orlando comprise perhaps the first, but not the only example in the novel of Woolf equating a physical death with inhabiting an ambiguous in-between stage of sexual existence. Shortly before Orlando meets Shel, and feels herself finally confirmed in her feminine identity, she confronts another crisis of sex and desire which leads her, this time, to be the one whom pronounces her own death. Woolf suggests that this state of a dreadful non-existence, which Orlando experiences up until the moment she encounters and becomes engaged to Shel, arises from a sense that, by being unmarried, Orlando is not enacting an important part of her identity as a live, heterosexual woman. This meltdown seems to be triggered initially by Orlando's observation of the social world around her, and a recognition that she has been performing her sex in some way improperly, failing to conform to an accepted ideal of what it means to be a woman. Orlando first observes:

> Couples trudged and plodded in the middle of the road indissolubly linked together. The woman's right hand was invariably passed through the man's left and her fingers were firmly gripped by his...Orlando could only suppose that some new discovery had been made about the race; they were somehow stuck together, couple after couple, but who had made it, and when, she could not guess. It did seem to be Nature (*Orlando* 242).

Here, Orlando's own observations about the appearances of the heterosexual couples that she sees seem to reflect most evidently an emerging physical closeness and interdependence inherent in relationships between men and women; the two appear to Orlando to have fused together, "indissolubly linked together," as the man further entwines himself with the woman by gripping

tightly onto fingers, as if not to let her slip. Notably, having entered the nineteenth century in Great Britain, every single person Orlando encounters seems to be in a heterosexual pairing, each walking forward with arms and hands in exactly the same specific position as the next, as apparently dictated by an individual's sex.

Orlando's perception of some interdependence between each man and woman that "did seem to be Nature" is easily read as something that extends beyond the realm of a physical codependence, particularly in the context of a novel which has continuously grounded sexual identity in entities decidedly separate from the human body. Orlando perceives that the man and woman appear so essentially intertwined that they each, in some sense, seem to form a coherent whole only when together as a couple. Woolf's description here seems to refer to an understanding of identity as grounded in a compulsory heterosexuality that both produces and is dependent upon the acceptance of a strict sex binary. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler summarizes her understanding of the interdependency of heterosexuality and individual sexual identity by explaining that "the regime of heterosexuality operates to circumscribe and contour the "materiality" of sex, and that "materiality" is formed and sustained through and as a materialization of regulatory norms that are in part those of a heterosexual hegemony" (15).

Like Butler, Woolf, too, is directly addressing and challenging the role that a system of compulsory heterosexuality plays in identity formation, here presenting men and women as, in some manner, incomplete halves of a single greater entity. These halves, in turn, are only sexed, and thus only materially legible, when placed directly next to one another. Woolf seems to be critiquing the notion that each man and woman is "by nature" compelled to seek out the other as a partner simply by virtue of existing, humorously describing Orlando's conclusion that this particular coupling of the man and woman is something inherent in her species' nature, essential

for individual survival. In depicting Orlando's rather absurd conclusion that a precise model of heterosexual marriage is some eternal truth about man that has persisted throughout history, only recently discovered by man himself, Woolf seems to be suggesting that a naturalized model of heterosexual desire and identity is something that is actually socially constructed, located in a specific historical moment. By describing a social arrangement that Orlando notices as specific to her present time period and invoking "Nature" (here with presented as an acting subject with a proper name) as the apparent cause, Woolf points to the irony of using instinct or nature as a reason for the socially implemented institution of marriage. Like Butler, Woolf alludes to an idea of sex and heterosexuality as connected and socially imposed imperatives, becoming naturalized and gaining authority through their consistent repetition to the extent that nature is mistakenly cited as their ultimate source. Moreover, Orlando appears not to recognize any other single women or men during the episode other than herself, adding to the sense that, in Orlando's world men and women may only legitimately exist in the presence of the other, or "opposite" sex.

Although Orlando initially accepts these couplings as a part of nature, she also maintains that she finds something about the arrangement mysteriously troubling. She looks at the animals surrounding her, wondering who it was that had discovered men and women must forever be bound together in marriage. Orlando observes that non-human creatures do not appear so systematically paired-off, noticing that there seemed to be "no indissoluble alliance among the brutes that she could see. Could it be Queen Victoria then, or Lord Melbourne? Was it from them that the great discovery of marriage proceeded?" Here, Orlando seems to be almost on the brink of considering that heterosexuality is perhaps something socially or even historically constructed rather than inborn, beginning to relate compulsory heterosexuality to those who preside over the

state, tracing the pattern back to the law itself. Even if a mandated heterosexuality is rooted in human nature, Orlando decides, it does not feel at all instinctual or comfortable to her personally. "It was strange-- it was distasteful; indeed, there was something in this indissolubility of bodies which was repugnant to her sense of decency and sanitation" (Woolf, *Orlando* 242). On one level, Orlando expresses distaste at the indissolubility of the bond between man and woman. There is, however, another possible layer of meaning embedded in Orlando's critique of coupling; namely, Orlando feels not only a disdain not only for the indissolubility of relationships but also for the materialization of individual bodies. In other words, this passage can also easily be read as Orlando expressing an aversion to a notion that individual bodies need to remain consistently categorizable, permanently inhabiting an unchanging state of being. Woolf's rather ambiguous wording here lends itself readily to a reading both as a critique of heterosexuality and as challenge to a bodily identity which remains stable and unfluctuating throughout time. Specifically in the context of a novel whose plot hinges on a drastic change of sexual identity, it is difficult not to interpret this line also as a commentary on presumed stability of any one sexual identity. Thus, by offering these critiques simultaneously, Woolf, like Butler, presents an understanding that sexual identity and a naturalized, mandatory heterosexuality are themselves inextricably intertwined, if not one and the same.

Despite the fact that Orlando does not seem personally to appreciate the imperative pairing of man and woman in matrimony, she does perceive this failure to somehow invalidate her position as a woman. So too, this knowledge threatens her physical status as a living person. After realizing that she has deviated from the confines of womanhood, her body and feelings become strangely unrecognizable to herself:

> Her muscles had lost their pliancy. She had become nervous lest there should be robbers behind the wainscot and afraid, for the first time in her life, of ghosts in the corridors. All

> these things inclined her, step by step, to submit to the new discovery, whether Queen Victoria's or another's, that each man and each woman has another allotted to it for life, whom it supports, by whom it is supported, till death them do part. It would be a comfort, she felt, to lean; to sit down; yes, to lie down; never, never, never to get up again (245).

Orlando realizes that, in order to be a "real" woman, she must "submit" to the idea of a passive Victorian womanhood in which she is relegated entirely to the sphere of the domestic, with no duty other than to lie down and rely entirely upon the man "allotted" to her for life. On another and perhaps more obscure level, however, Orlando also begins to experience both physical and emotional change beyond her own control as she accepts heterosexuality as the ultimate goal and necessity of life, recognizing that she has not fulfilled this prerequisite for femininity. In this sense, her descent into a state of non-being is triggered precisely by Orlando's rather reluctant "submission" to the power of a heterosexual matrix. She yearns "to lean; to sit down; yes, to lie down" and "never, never, never to get up again." This resistant acceptance forces Orlando to recognize herself as a single woman who must submit to the natural order of womanhood and humanity, resulting in both actual bodily deterioration and a psychological drive towards death, towards a permanent physical self-erasure. At the same time that the entirety of Orlando 's identity begins to degenerate as a result of her self-aware singleness, she explicitly aligns heterosexual love with life, linking death with the absence or breakdown of this relationship. Being a woman is one kind of annihilation. But individual non-being or non-existence will necessarily result also from failure to conform to heterosexual desire as an integral part of identity.

The despair and disintegration of the self that follows Orlando's realization and eventual acceptance of an identity that "naturally" mandates heterosexuality climaxes with an actual proclamation of death. In fact, this statement of non-being is the first thing that Orlando says to Shel, the foundation on which their relationship is so swiftly established: "Madam," the man

cried, leaping to the ground, "you're hurt!" "I'm dead, Sir!" she replied, leading to their engagement just "a few minutes later" (250). This passage is comedic, again playing on the fact that it is quite evident that Orlando is not actually dead, as evidenced by the fact that she is able to speak. Despite Woolf's humorous tone, Orlando really is as an example of the abject group that Butler talks about, people who, although technically alive, fail to meet the requirements of personhood, and, thus, might as well be dead. Orlando has come to fully accept and enact the rules of a heterosexually defined identity; she is an unmarried and thus an incomplete or non-existent being amidst a sea of couples. Here, however, it is not society or the law that directly pronounces Orlando's death in this moment, but Orlando herself, a complete paradox. Woolf's examination of Orlando's symbolic death sheds light on the otherwise completely naturalized process of what it means both to become and to fail to become a person. Taking on this project, Woolf presents Orlando as a character who is exaggeratedly hyper-aware of the rules of ritual and desire which govern sexual identity, illustrating a seemingly absurd scenario in which one fails to recognize oneself as a living person even while speaking the words "I'm dead" aloud. In this sense, Woolf portrays an exaggerated version of the non-being that Butler suggests is regularly and much more subtly imposed upon real people who do not conform to accepted rules of sexual identity.

As a self-acknowledged non-being Orlando meets Shel; what is Woolf saying in this encounter about identity and the heterosexual matrix? On one hand, Shel very much seems to be saving Orlando from death, finding her on the ground in a state of abjection, picking her up from her abased position as an incomplete or insufficient woman, and redeeming her with his masculine affection; the two soon become another unit among those strolling couples that Orlando had observed earlier. Significantly, it is only directly after Orlando has legally married

Shel, proclaiming herself a woman and conforming to a heterosexual model of desire, that Orlando receives legal confirmation that she is, in fact, a woman. "'My sex, she read out with some solemnity, 'is pronounced indisputably, and without the shadow of a doubt (what was I telling you a moment ago, Shel?) Female" (255). In this sense, Shel is reviving Orlando, bringing her into being by making her legible in terms of the heterosexual matrix.

Paradoxically, Orlando's heterosexual resurrection is directly preceded by her defiant decision to choose nature, rather than man, as her erotic partner. Nature as an abstract as well as poetic construct plays a very large role in the text; Woolf uses language and imagery that aligns Orlando very closely with the natural environment surrounding her, as someone who is eternally at one and "in love" with "the birds and the trees...the evening sky, the homing rooks...He was describing, as all young poets are forever describing, nature" (16). In fact, quite early on Woolf suggests that Orlando is perhaps even more attuned to the natural world than is particularly healthy for a writer, attempting to express the truths of nature in his work, but essentially failing in attempting to "match the shade of green precisely," by looking "(and here he showed more audacity than most) at the thing itself, which happened to be a laurel bush...he could write no more. Green in nature is one thing, green in literature another. Nature and letters seem to have a natural antipathy...they tear each other to pieces" (16-17). Her own alleged "death" occurs shortly after Orlando flings herself to the ground in anguish over her aloneness, immersing herself in the natural phenomena that have always fascinated her, and submitting herself entirely to nature:

> Then, some strange ecstasy came over her. Some wild notion she had of following the birds to the rim of the world and flinging herself on the spungy turf and there drinking forgetfulness, while the rooks' hoarse laughter was in her ears. "I have found my mate," she murmured. "It is the moor. I am nature's bride," she whispered, giving herself in rapture to the cold embraces of the grass as she lay folded in her cloak in the hollow by

> the pool..."Here I will lie...I shall dream wild dreams. My hands shall wear no wedding ring...[t]he roots shall twine about them" (248).

Here, Orlando describes the sensual appeal of the natural world in vivid detail. Woolf paints a "wedding" scene that is almost orgasmic in describing Orlando's state of ecstatic harmony with nature, refusing notions of heterosexual romance in favor of becoming one with her surroundings, "the cold embraces of the grass." Orlando claims to reject marriage in this instant, yet even her utterances of defiance imitate the conventions of a heterosexual relationship, as she becomes nature's "bride," suggesting that the roots of the trees should imitate the shape of a wedding ring around her finger, perhaps further suggesting an understanding that the concept of heterosexual marriage, of rings and brides and grooms, is somehow grounded within a natural order. To some extent, then, even in non-compliance, a certain type of highly sexed, regulated, identity is inescapable as Orlando imagines nature to mimic aspects of the same institution she claims to be in the process of rejecting. She does not have any other language to articulate her own desires, even though she certainly is not "marrying" nature in the traditional manner of speaking.

It is difficult not to read Orlando's momentary push against heterosexuality as symbolic of an upsurge of queer desire, a deviant feeling only imaginable in the framework of heterosexuality, indicating how ingrained the tenants of a compulsory heterosexuality have become for Orlando. Queer desire here is figured in images associated with both death and a kind of ecstatically forbidden sensuality. Effectively equating queer pleasure with both boundless ecstasy and morbidity, Woolf illustrates how, even as Orlando lies undeniably corpse-like on the cold ground she embraces, performing her own burial by wrapping herself in her cloak and imagining the roots of plants someday winding around her fingers, she enters a state of overwhelmed euphoria akin to the intense sensory upheaval she had experienced upon first

seeing Sasha. Once again, Orlando uneasily inhabits her body and its desires. Choosing queer desire and rejecting compulsory heterosexuality produces another kind of death, ecstatically intertwined with euphoria as Orlando momentarily ceases to exist.

Shortly after Orlando chooses to embrace queer desire in submitting to nature, becoming its "bride," she makes arrangements to become an actual bride. Orlando's embrace of death through queer desire makes it possible for Shel to find Orlando resting prone; he notices her in an attempt not to trample her with his horse. Had Orlando not gone through the process of recognizing and experiencing the consequences of a queer sensuality, she never would have had the opportunity to pursue a "legitimate" sexual identity via her heterosexual love for Shel; had she never gone through the process of realization and "unbecoming" that led Shel to her, she would never have been faced with the opportunity of redemption, of "becoming" a meaningful body. It seems then, for Orlando, that heterosexual love, and, in turn, a meaningful sexual identity, is only made possible through some sort of death of the self, a significant recognition and subsequent rejection of some part of her body and identity. In other words, Woolf seems to imply that Orlando first needs to die in order to be resurrected at all; her identity as a heterosexual woman is facilitated by an occupation of the space of the abject, the non-being.

Butler, too, sees the process of "death," of relating to and rejecting the realm of the uninhabitable, as an integral part of the process of sex performativity, of maintaining a legible identity: she presents this as another reason why it is so vital to explore the conditions of illegible or forbidden identities.

> It is the repeated repudiation by which the subject installs its boundary and constructs its claim to 'integrity' that concerns us here. This is not a buried identification that is left behind in a forgotten past, but an identification that must be leveled and buried again and again, the compulsive repudiation by which the subject incessantly sustains his/her boundary (*Bodies That Matter* 114).

Here, Butler claims that, on an individual level, people establish their identities through a process of continuously identifying with and then repudiating or "burying" desires that would threaten or invalidate their sexual identity, thus defining themselves as subjects not merely against some abstract ideal of a deviant "outside," but against a part of themselves, a desire that they have actually experienced and "buried again and again." In fact, according to Butler, the identification with the realm of the abject before disavowal is a critical step in the formation and maintenance of a coherent and legible sexual identity. Thinking of Orlando's "death" in this light, it seems logical that her initial rejection of heterosexuality, resulting in an identification with queer desire and a descent into non-existence, should ultimately facilitate her marriage to Shel. Woolf seems to be illustrating a process of identification and disavowal much like the one that Butler asserts is crucial to maintaining a properly sexed identity; Orlando must first occupy the space of the queer non-being before rejecting it to become a "real woman." Somewhat paradoxically, for both Butler and Woolf, this initial identification with illegitimate identity, this "death," is precisely that which facilitates an individual formation of subject. Just as Orlando must for a moment bury herself, submerging herself in the ecstatic nothingness of queer desire in order to re-emerge a true woman, so too does Butler believe individuals must acknowledge and then bury their own forbidden impulses in order to "sustain his/her boundary."

Butler insists that this process of identification with and then rejection of desires that fall outside of acceptable identity is a continuous one, and that, in order to maintain a coherent identity, one must periodically go through the process of becoming and then burying or denouncing the status of belonging to the constitutive "outside" of identity. Ironically, Butler suggests that it is this prevailing discontinuity of a subject that must constantly identify itself

with and then disavow various non-identities that allows for the impression of a singular and unchanging self.

> What is refused or repudiated in the formation of the subject continues to determine that subject. What remains outside this subject, set outside by the act of foreclosure which founds the subject, persists as a kind of defining negativity. The subject is, as a result, never coherent and never self-identical precisely because it is found and, indeed, continually refounded, through a set of defining foreclosures and repressions that constitute the discontinuity and incompletion of the subject (*Bodies That Matter* 190).

Orlando, having just undergone one such process of repudiation and foreclosure, emerges from her time of "defining negativity," death," or non-being seemingly "coherent" and "self-identical" as a woman. Although this instance is perhaps the most obvious moment of identity-death and resurrection, Orlando is, throughout the book, continuously undergoing this procedure of "foreclosure" and "founding" of her own sexuality, indulging desires that threaten a coherent identity, and then swiftly repudiating them to reinforce the validity of her sex (whatever that may be at the current moment). This is evidenced slightly later in the novel, after Orlando's official status as a woman has been proclaimed, as Shel still anxiously questions once more: "Are you positive you aren't a man?" and Orlando returns "Can it be possible you're not a woman?" suggesting that the possibility of homosexuality is something that is constantly to be considered and then disavowed by the couple, a necessary re-legitimization of sexual identity that takes place from time to time (Woolf, *Orlando* 258).

This idea of continual refusal or repudiation of homosexuality persists even after Orlando is married. Orlando composes a poem, abruptly coming to a halt after writing "Sullen and foreign-looking, the snaky flower,/ Scarfed in dull purple, like Egyptian girls-"a sentiment to which Orlando feels that the "spirit of the age" strongly objects, asking her:"Are girls necessary? You have a husband at the Cape you say? Ah well, that'll do" (265). Here, Woolf writes of another, although potentially more subtle, moment in which a queer type of love is first

imagined and then quite quickly censored, as Orlando imagines the prevailing "spirit" of the time asking her why she has chosen to include girls in her poem, apparently worried about such a deviant expression of desire. Both Orlando and the alleged spirit (really a part of Orlando herself) immediately soothe away any anxiety by restating the fact that Orlando has a husband, and thus must unquestionably possess only the proper kinds of desires for a married woman to display, despite evidence to the contrary. Woolf humorously illustrates a process of identification and then regulation as the possibility of homosexuality is raised by Orlando, and just as quickly, put to bed.

3. The Individual and "The Spirit of the Age"

While I have in this chapter thus far continuously alluded to the complex origins of Orlando's drive to conform to sexual standards, I now want to take a moment to focus specifically on the relationship between society and the individual in creating this compulsion. In my first chapter dealing with Woolf's short stories, I suggest that Woolf's portrayal of gender reflects Butler's attention to presentation and showmanship as also having a hand in constructing the very "self" which might be said to enact or perform, rejecting the idea that the reality of an individual's "real" gender identity can ever be separated from regulatory social norms. Although this idea of performativity seems more readily applicable to gender than to sexual identity, here I want to expand upon this train of thought by explicitly extending Butler's theory of gender performativity to sexual identity as Woolf presents it in *Orlando*.

Butler writes *Bodies That Matter* in part in response to the common claim that sex is something that cannot be performative precisely because of its apparent connection to the body, something that Butler is particularly interested in for its contemporary applications to feminism

in which there seems to be a drive to define the "woman" in terms of specific psychobiological characteristics:

> It has seemed to many, I think, that in order for feminism to proceed as a critical practice, it must ground itself in the sexed specificity of the female body. Even as the category of sex is always reinscribed as gender, that sex must still be presumed as the irreducible point of departure for the various cultural constructions it has come to bear. And this presumption of the material irreducibility of sex has seemed to ground and authorize feminist epistemologies and ethics, as well as gendered analyses of various kinds....[H]ow is it that the materiality of sex is understood as that which only bears cultural constructions, and, therefore, cannot be a construction?" (20).

Butler steadfastly challenges the assertion that "sex" naturally should not be challenged because of its supposed materiality, suggesting that the impulse to interpret sex as an undeniable, underlying truth of identity is something that, just as much as the validity of a "true" gender identity, deserves to be questioned. In other words, Butler asserts that it is insufficient to rely on materiality as grounding for the intrinsic truth of human sexual identity. She challenges feminists who call into question the apparent "truth" of gender identity while refusing to do the same for sex. Why is it that it seems more legitimate to suggest that a traditionally gendered choice of clothing or hairstyle ultimately has no reflection on an individual's pre-disposition than to suggest that anatomy should not come to define something inherent about the nature of the person? Our manner of reading bodies is no more natural or irreducible.

Butler asserts that these questions are far from inconsequential, as such inquiries work to expose and challenge both the nature of sex and gender studies as well as the future of feminism as a movement. Butler suggests that a failure to critique the supremacy of a presumed sexual materiality is both potentially counterproductive and perhaps also discriminatory in nature precisely because this ignores and blindly perpetuates the complex and power-ridden contexts in which materiality is embedded. "Indeed, if it can be shown that in its constitutive history this 'irreducible' materiality is constructed through a problematic gendered matrix, then the discursive

practice by which matter is rendered irreducible simultaneously ontologizes and fixes that gendered matrix into its place"(29). In this sense, Butler believes that it is key to the destabilization of oppressive gendered and sexual matrixes to question realities that have been rendered "unquestionable."

Although Butler contends that sexualized terms and categories are undeniably integral to discussions of identity formation and subjugation, this should not shield them from being subjected to the same types of critique which one might apply to other, seemingly more abstract types of distinctions. Perhaps those distinctions that appear completely naturalized are most deeply ingrained within ideology, and in most need of being deconstructed, subject to analytical scrutiny. Butler advocates for a conscientious and critical use of any categorical language:

> This speaking will occur, and for feminist reasons, it must; the category of women does not become useless through deconstruction, bur becomes one whose uses are no longer reified as "referents," and which stand a chance of being opened up, indeed, of coming to signify in ways that none of us can predict in advance...[I]t is clear from the start that matter has a history (indeed, more than one) and that the history of matter is in part determined by the negotiation of sexual difference. We may seek to return to matter as prior to discourse to ground our claims about sexual difference only to discover that matter is fully sedimented through discourses on sex and sexuality that prefigure and constrain the uses to which the term can be put (29).

Thus, much as gendered behaviors that might appear naturalized have actually arisen within a certain historical and social context, Butler urges against relying on the materiality of sex as a "truth" on which to rely, a stable and prevailing signifier. Rather, for Butler, it is important to understand that matter, too, is recognized by and implicated in an established and continuously monitored system of meanings and values. In this way, it makes sense for Butler that sex should be evaluated as something incorporating a largely performative element that is worthy of inspection, a process of doing and becoming that cannot be silenced or answered by appealing to any material or anatomical truth.

Woolf, too, is highly critical of materiality as a point of reference, poking fun at this idea of the body as an all-encompassing, unchallenged part of identity, primarily by denying the reader any access to meaningful information regarding the physical status of Orlando's anatomical sex, significantly omitting the very information in which sexual materialists would be most interested. Having addressed the issue of materiality and understanding that it is useful to examine sex as something that is rooted less in the truth of the body than how we construct that "truth," perhaps it will be easier to move beyond initial reservations about seeing sex as something explicitly that is part "performance," and begin to look at the origins of the impulse to "be" a sex, as Woolf lays them out in *Orlando*.

I now want to turn to textual instances in which Woolf depicts Orlando's "drive" to perform first his and then her sex as neither something outside of a constitutive "true" self nor a work of fiction that is always consciously chosen by a free actor.

> Hence, the reading of 'performativity' as willful and arbitrary choice misses the point that the historicity of discourse and, in particular, the historicity of the norms (the "chains" of iteration invoked and dissimulated in the imperative utterance) constitute the power of discourse to enact what it names. To think of "sex" as an imperative in this way means that a subject is addressed and produced by such a norm, and that this norm- the regulatory power of which it is a token- materializes bodies as an effect of that injunction (*Bodies That Matter* 187).

Butler emphasizes the formative powers of performativity by evoking its historical specificity, the "historicity of norms," which speaks directly to Woolf's construction of a historical satire via the temporal evolution of Orlando's character (something that I will speak more on later in the chapter). Butler reminds us that, when thinking about sex performativity, it is necessary to consider not only sex as a performance, but also as a formative process in which the acting individual is grounded. Thus sex is not something that can be performed arbitrarily in relation to the norms of society by any individual. Performativity is a cycle whereby the object is produced and reproduced through contact with ideas and mannerisms; in this sense, it is futile to attempt

an exploration of which traits or behaviors are "genuine" or inherent and which are constructed or adopted "acts." In this way, Butler suggests that sex is not purely a construct assumed through individual agency or will. Rather, through performativity, social ideology and the individual become inextricably intertwined; there are no clear distinctions between the "inner" self and an outside force of society. This sentiment is integral to Joseph Boone's reading of sex and sexuality in modernist texts, describing "the complexities and complications whereby the negotiations of desire that make up both the subject and the subject's worldview dissolve distinctions of 'inner' and 'outer'-- and, along with them, the normalizing sexual categories that, as Butler has shown, this binary maintains" (9).

In an entry from *A Writer's Diary,* composed during the time in which she was writing *Orlando*, Woolf asks: "And what is my own position towards the inner and the outer?..I think even externality is good; some combination of them ought to be possible" (136). Woolf stresses the ambiguity between the inner and outer worlds again and again as Orlando incorporates society's judgments into her own perspective, finding it difficult to comprehend herself as a legitimate and cohesive being without reference to what is "outside" the subject. There are many instances in which Orlando seems to be exaggeratedly conscious of her own need to "perform" a sex, which would seem at first glance to imply some pre-existing actor who chooses to take on particular role, contrary to Butler's notion of sex performativity. The examples that I have discussed so far, however, prove perhaps so humorous that they seem to take on a parodic component, exaggerating the process of what it means to conform to sexual rules with the effect of shedding light upon an otherwise obscure and naturalized system of identification and, in turn, heightening the absurdity of the notion that something so convoluted should be construed as inherent or natural. Woolf consistently destroys the binary between the self and society in her

depiction of Orlando's character at various pivotal moments throughout the novel, illustrating Orlando's impulse to conform to sexual standards as a drive that is neither entirely externally imposed nor arising from some inherent drive separate from society. In fact, when Orlando is faced with profound sexual crisis, as she is first confronted with mandatory heterosexuality and the "indissolubility of bodies," Woolf hints that the sexual demands of society have become an integral part of Orlando's awareness of her own body:

> But all this agitation seemed at length to concentrate in her hands; and then in one hand, and then in one finger of that hand, and then finally to contract itself so that it made a ring of quivering sensibility about the second finger of the left hand. And when she raised it to see what caused this agitation, she saw nothing-- nothing but the vast solitary emerald which Queen Elizabeth had given her. And was the not enough? she asked...The vibration seemed, in the oddest way (but remember we are dealing with some of the darkest manifestations of the human soul) to say No, that is not enough; and, further, to assume a note of interrogation, as if they were asking, what did it mean, this hiatus, this strange oversight? till poor Orlando felt positively ashamed of the second finger of her left hand without in the least knowing why (Woolf, *Orlando* 240).

Interestingly, here, the sexual pressures of society to assume the position of a wife take the form chiefly of physical symptoms, as if they were as much a part of Orlando's body as her own senses or innermost feelings. The ring from Queen Elizabeth symbolizes parts of Orlando that have now grown outdated; initially a product of the Elizabethan age, Orlando finds the standards of identity for which she was once held accountable are no longer sufficient. Woolf implies here that society's norms have become an integral part of Orlando's very being to the extent that she experiences their personal impact before she even recognizes their symbolic significance in a societal context, suggesting that an urge to validate her sexual identity via heterosexual marriage has become grounded in her body. Notably, what is considered the organic or the "natural" is directly mimicking the socially constructed, as Orlando feels the vibrations of her body "making a ring," copying the shape of an artificially manufactured and highly symbolic object as if such a thing were as much a natural part of the body as one of Orlando's own fingers, suggesting a

significant confusion between the inner and the outer, the man-made and the inherent or organic. Much as the law supports a constructed binary maintained through compulsory heterosexuality as a discovery "found" within human's nature, Woolf echoes this naturalization of the constructed by depicting the wedding ring, something obviously inorganic, as an extension that Orlando interprets as a part of her own material body.

That the sensation around Orlando's ring finger is, in fact, symbolic of a societal pressure to wed is supported shortly after this passage, as she immediately focuses obsessively on the wedding ring of her servant, wishing to examine it but being rejected, as it is something the woman holds sacred above all else, untouchable by any other human hands. Woolf mocks the notion that the wedding ring and all that it stands for should be regarded as an object of such unquestionable power, as Orlando asks to touch the servant's ring and the woman replies "that it was by the gleam on her wedding ring that she would be assigned her station among the angels and its lustre would be tarnished forever if she left it out of her keeping for a second" (241). This example illustrates and exaggerates the absurd reverence paid to the institution of marriage, parodying an idea that the wedding ring should be something so holy and so all-encompassing that its maintenance is the sole prerequisite for acceptance into heaven. Indeed, the servant's words imply an understanding that before God, her identity is only validated, indeed only recognized, by her union with her husband.

Much like Butler's descriptions of performativity, Woolf here depicts the normative sexual constraints which bind Orlando as integrated into subjectivity. Moreover, it seems significant that the passage about the sensation in Orlando's finger is perhaps the moment in which Woolf places the most emphasis on Orlando's body, a fact which might seem strange in a narrative that is presumably about a change of sex. In this sense, Woolf can be seen here as

distorting or subverting the sexed expectations of the body. Indeed, the experience of her material body (the tingling of her ring finger) does eventually lead Orlando to validate her sexual identity as a woman, initiating the chain of events which leads her to heterosexual marriage with Shel. Her sexual organs serve not as the catalyst, but rather a sensation in the part of the body that is perhaps most symbolically implicated in society's recognition of lawful, heterosexual relationships, suggesting that, as Butler suggests, sex is determined by society's ability to materialize bodies. Indeed, Orlando feels the pull located in her ring finger to extend through the entirety of her body: "Though the seat of her trouble seemed to be the left finger, she could feel herself poisoned through and through, and was forced at length to consider the most desperate of remedies, which was to yield completely and submissively to the spirit of the age and take a husband"(243). Here, Woolf even invents a term which refers specifically to the sexual standards of Orlando's current time, referring to these "poisoning" constraints, heavily focused on heterosexual marriage, as "the spirit of the age."

It is precisely society's ability to impact Orlando's being in a very integral way which causes her to realize her sexual inadequacy as a woman, leading her directly to marriage. Boone describes society's ability to regulate sexuality from a place seemingly inside of the subject: "Judith Butler has pressed Foucault's theory of discursive power further to demonstrate how assumptions of 'interiority'...are effects of sexual and gender ideologies whose power lies in their ability to posit as "natural" or "innate" social constructions that are in fact enacted upon the body" (8). Woolf presents a distinct case for the discursive process that Boone describes in which society imposes its ideology on Orlando's body both physically, affecting her finger, and emotionally, as she comes to understand she must accept the pull of the "spirit of the age" and

marry, thus reaffirming her status as a legitimate woman. In this sense, the true material source of sex is depicted as the body which has been formed and labeled by a social process.

Woolf makes it quite plain that, although the spirit of the age has rooted itself in Orlando's being, it is not something that inherently existed within her; rather, it is depicted as something that molds Orlando to its will from the inside, and not without considerable violence against any pre-existing desires that do not conform to its dictates. After being forced to consider marriage as the solution to the discomfort in her finger, it becomes clear that to accept the spirit of the age as a part of herself is in part a destructive act, barring Orlando from pursuing desires that do not conform to society's sexual standards:

> That this was much against her natural temperament, has been sufficiently made plain. When the sound of the Archduke's chariot wheels died away, the cry that rose to her lips was 'Life! A Lover!' not 'Life! A Husband!'...Such is the indomitable nature of the spirit of the age however, that it batters down any one who tries to make stand against it far more effectually than those who bend its own way....and thus it broke her, and she was aware of her defeat at its hands (Woolf, *Orlando* 244)

Here, Woolf invokes the heterosexual matrix as a large part of Orlando's painful submission to the spirit of the age, as she realizes that she must look not for an ambiguously "Lover," but a legally wed, undeniably male, "Husband." Specifically, the spirit of the age seems to be eliminating this part of Orlando, situated in her "natural temperament" (and thereby suggesting another kind of inclination which must be broken and bent by society's conception of "natural" sexuality), which desired anything other than a Husband. In this way, this passage suggests that it would be a mistake to say that Orlando has much individual agency in choosing to submit herself to the modern role of the heterosexual woman; rather, these pressures seize Orlando and force her into the confines of an identity at the expense of the forbidden desires which she is forced to ruthlessly eradicate. By using the words "batter," "broke," and "defeat" to describe Orlando's transformative process, Woolf emphasizes the aggressiveness with which the spirit of

the age acts upon Orlando from the inside. Relating this passage back to Butler's assertion of a constitutive "outside" of non-being that defines the inside of acceptable identity, Woolf's portrait of Orlando's submission too involves active and violent exclusions of particular selves in order to inhabit a socially accepted sexual identity. In other words, although it seems plain that the spirit of the age acts from a place located ambiguously inside of Orlando's own being, Woolf also makes clear that her choices are not pure acts of individual will, but, rather, the choices of a subject which must commit acts of violence against its own inclinations in order to be recognized as legitimate even by itself.

At the moment of Orlando's marriage to Shel, the wedding ring takes on an even more overtly symbolic significance as a tool of heterosexual and patriarchal oppression: "no one heard the word Obey spoken or saw, except as a golden flash, the ring pass from hand to hand" (262). The ceremonial exchange, reflecting Orlando's ultimately obedient "submission" to society's expectations, seems to enact a grander change in Orlando's character, suggesting that the very act of wearing a wedding band should have an effect on who Orlando is as an individual. Immediately after the wedding, Orlando seems to undergo a rapid shift of personality and judgment with regard to both her body and her feelings, now in harmony with the spirit of the age. Orlando even undergoes a solitary ceremony of her own, once the wedding has ended, attempting to indoctrinate herself into the role she has just accepted:

> The wedding ring has to be put on the second finger of the left hand,'she said, like a child cautiously repeating its lesson, 'for it to be of any use at all'...she rather wished someone whose good opinion she desired to overhear her. Indeed, she had in mind, now that she was at last able to collect her thoughts, the effect that her behaviour would have had upon the spirit of the age. She was extremely anxious to be informed whether the steps she had taken in the matter of getting engaged to Shelmerdine and marrying him met with its approval. She was certainly feeling more herself. Her finger had not tingled once, or nothing to count, since that night on the moor (264).

This passage implies an awareness, on Orlando's part, of her own success in learning and conforming to the heterosexual role to which society has assigned her. Her clumsy repetition of the placement of the wedding ring emphasizes the fact that the "natural" union of man and woman is something that she has, in fact, been taught, and is continuously processing, incorporating this information (previously explained as "against her natural temperament") into a naturalized part of her identity. She actively seeks approval for her repetition of these words, an acknowledgement that she is performing her identity in the right way, showing some level of awareness that she is doing something of which society would strongly approve. Yet, at the same time, Orlando admits that her success is pleasing to herself, both in terms of her ring finger (which has stopped aching), and in modifying herself in a way that she hopes will please the spirit of the age, an authoritative voice that resides within Orlando while prompting her to conform to a coherent sexual identity.

After Orlando is married, her continuous awareness of the "spirit of the age" reflects the manner in which Butler describes a performatively sexed subject becoming incessantly self-regulated according to societal norms. Woolf specifically locates Orlando's own spirit as the source of a sort of self-censorship and correction, continuously holding Orlando accountable for an acceptable maintenance of identity. This idea of self-accountability is particularly visible as Orlando begins to write of anything that she feels the spirit of the age would not approve: "she felt that power (remember we are dealing with the most obscure manifestations of the human spirit) which had been reading over her shoulder, tell her to stop" (265). Woolf presents the "spirit of the age" here as something located both within and without Orlando's being, created by Orlando as a "manifestation" of her spirit, while simultaneously reading over her shoulder, granted a certain agency in crafting her actions that appear beyond Orlando's control. Woolf

illustrates a version of sexual performativity that is perpetuated by concurrent forces working from both inwardly and outwardly; Orlando's own being is described as having given birth to "the spirit of the age," and the biographer lists her own spirit as the source of the very identity regulations that come to dominate during the 19th century. This scene aptly illustrates Butler's conception of performative identity as a force that somehow reads over the shoulder just as it works from the inside to craft the words that the hand writes.

Directly following this incident of self-censorship, Woolf describes Orlando's curious relationship with "the spirit of the age" as a type of performance, but a performance which is not carried out simply for the body, nor purely for an external audience. "Orlando now performed in spirit (for all this took place in spirit) a deep obeisance to the spirit of her age...for she was extremely doubtful whether, if the spirit had examined the contents of her mind carefully, it would not have found something highly contraband for which she would have to pay the full fine" (265). Woolf uses a smuggling metaphor to describe any errant desires that may remain underneath the wedding ring, as if Orlando has several selves: one of which, unwittingly, brings "contraband" feelings with her into a new self where these traits are no longer tolerated. The type of performance with which Orlando engages here, taking place "in spirit" suggests that the process of conforming to social norms is one that is highly internalized, a piece that is perfected largely in the space of one's own consciousness even as its origins are traced back to society. The audience for the performance, too, is highly complex; Orlando performs not explicitly or primarily for others, but rather for the "spirit of the age," a facet of her own self, which thus comprises her own primary audience. Boone explains how the "inner" plane of existence, rather than the surface or the exterior, necessarily becomes a space of performance: "even within the realm of the interior, the mind remains a kind of representational theater, a performative play of

surfaces and exteriors that makes any 'full apprehension of an originating inner 'self' impossible" (184). Orlando simultaneously creates and observes herself, as "the spirit of the age" surreptitiously takes its place somewhere inside of her own spirit, the two becoming ambiguously interchangeable, one entity.

At times, Woolf presents her protagonist as almost ridiculously performative in nature. Part of the genius behind Woolf's construction of Orlando's character is that he/she is in the most unusual, seemingly impossible position of being able to occasionally forget his/her sexual identity in a way that most people (who have never unintentionally undergone a sex change, and if they did would probably be much more concerned about it) would not, emphasizing the theatrical nature of "having" a sex. These humorously theatrical instances of self-regulation shed light on the extent to which Orlando must hold herself accountable to the rules of her sex, refuting the notion that any particularly sexed behavior comes "naturally" according to assigned sex. Usually through instances of extreme self-consciousness, an exaggerated and straightforward understanding emerges of how society would expect Orlando to behave based on her sex. Shortly after Orlando allegedly transitions into a woman, she experiences one of these moments of overt self-regulation and performance, as she abruptly finds herself aware that she, now a woman, has been left alone with the Archduke, a man. "Recalled thus suddenly to a consciousness of her sex, which she had completely forgotten, and, of his, which was now remote enough to be equally upsetting, Orlando felt seized with faintness. 'La!' she cried, putting her hand to her side, 'how you frighten me!'" (Woolf, *Orlando* 178). Here, sex appears at first, quite literally, as an afterthought, a binary framework that Orlando recognizes only after the fact and imposes upon the situation in order to legitimate it as an encounter between a man and a woman. At first not thinking of the interaction in terms of sexual roles, Orlando is vaulted into a

hyper consciousness of the rules of interactions between the sexes, and thus immediately begins performing the part of the frail, frightened woman, in a state of terrified awe by the specimen of a gruff masculinity sitting beside her.

Shortly after this exchange, Woolf describes how "they acted the parts of man and woman for ten minutes with great vigour," further stressing the staged, manufactured nature of these interactions and clearly mocking the notion of these roles as purely inborn or naturally related to sex by suggesting that sex is a carefully constructed paradigm (181). Here, Orlando regards the roots of her feminine faintness as internal, something she feels rather than something that she consciously does, supporting the notion that she has internalized the rules of her identity, and further complicating the boundaries between conscious and unconscious or subconscious types of identity performance. Thus, Woolf depicts those behaviors that appear motivated by a conscious decision to perform as connected also to something internal, an integral part of Orlando's own interpretation of herself.

As she watches the Archduke begin to cry, Orlando again calls up rules for typical "womanly" behavior in judging how she is to react. "That men cry as frequently and as unreasonably as women, Orlando knew from her own experience as a man; but she was beginning to be aware that women should be shocked when men display emotion in their presence, and so, shocked she was" (180). Here, Orlando goes so far as to briefly acknowledge the irony and irrationality of feeling shocked at the Archduke's display of emotion, but, due to a learned consciousness that she must follow a particular script in this situation, she complies in playing her part. In fact, shortly before this episode, Orlando herself had dealt with the question of acceptable emotional expression and bodily response when, after attempting to hold back tears, she supposedly forgets the rules of her new identity "until, remembering that it is becoming

in a woman to weep, she let them flow" (165). Again, Woolf places Orlando in the fantastically impossible position of inadvertently having inhabited both sexual identities in order to underscore how arbitrarily embodied characteristics of an individual are attributed to a "natural sex," when, indeed, these seemingly stable identities are something learned, reenacted, and maintained. Importantly, Orlando does not modify simply her outward behavior in response to the Archduke's display, but somewhat ambiguously seems to alter her actual emotional state with an awareness of how she should react, becoming thoroughly "shocked," even though Woolf has just told us that she is not inclined to be at all surprised in the first place. Paradoxically, Orlando violates her own "nature" to conform to the "natural" characteristics of her proscribed sex.

Explicit awareness of the theatricality of sex and the body points to Orlando's understanding of the behaviors of others, and, particularly, of other women. This is apparent in a scene in which, although now technically a woman, Orlando is still unmarried, and, deciding to dress as a man (as she was wont to do on occasion shortly after her transformation), converses with a female prostitute.

> To feel her hanging lightly yet like a suppliant on her arm, roused in Orlando all the feelings which become a man. She looked, she felt, she talked like one. Yet, having been so lately a woman herself, she suspected that the girl's timidity and her hesitating answers and the very fumbling with the key in the latch and the fold of her cloak and the droop of her wrist were all put on to gratify her masculinity (217).

Orlando resorts to a heterosexual matrix to define her feelings of otherwise forbidden desire; even though she too is a woman, she does not understand her attraction to the young woman in terms of a homosexual inclination (the more obvious choice), but rather as a moment of residual "manliness," only able to express her own homoerotic feelings in terms of an accepted heterosexuality in which she figuratively takes the place of the "man." Woolf implies that Orlando, although this time not having undergone any supposed physiological change, finds it difficult to define herself as anything other than a man, "having been" a woman rather recently,

but in this moment experiencing her body (being "roused") as something quite different. At the same time, Orlando seems to understand that the woman's delicate and timid behaviors, the very aspects of her character which are meant to make Orlando feel most like a man, are fictional, "put upon" as a standard of femininity against which Orlando (if she were in fact a man) can affirm to a masculine identity. Orlando sees the notions of "opposite" sexes as a fantasy in itself, an enacted identity against which others define and project themselves.

The passage of time and changing of tradition become particularly important to an analysis of Orlando's brand of performativity, particularly as an individual whose lifespan defies the constraints of a normal life, living for several hundreds of years. Butler describes performativity as a continuous process of citation and repetition of norms, and because social norms evolve and change through time, it makes sense, then, that Orlando would have to adapt the ways in which she cites and performs sex as time goes by. "Performativity is thus not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition"(Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 12). An individual's performative behaviors through time work to internalize, naturalize, and obscure the very regulations by which they are produced, necessarily making the individual very much a product of and a participant in the particular era. Joseph Boone, too, stresses the fluid nature of sexual performativity through time, emphasizing specifically the significance of adapting to an ever-changing present moment (reminiscent of Woolf's "spirit of the age"), and suggesting that shifting standards of sexuality can help reveal the same social forces by which they are shaped. Borrowing terminology from the editors of *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality,* Boone alludes to a temporal

understanding of sexuality as something that is continuously relocating within a changing present moment:

> '[S]exuality is, at the moment, a comparatively open subject'...As the double meanings of the phrase, 'at the moment,' so well capture, when the historical moment undergoes change, so too do conceptions and experiences of sexuality. Despite the regulatory pressures that threaten to subdue feelings and expressions, they continue to emerge in new, unpredictable forms that reveal their subversive 'power' to incite and shape desire (2-3).

Performativity, then, must itself be something which is never complete or established, ever changing in regard to that which it cites, shifting in nature as the laws and expectations of society develop over time. The decidedly unfixed nature of sexual norms lends, as Boone suggests, to a destabilization of the sexed regulations which are so often obscured, accepted as "natural" or inborn; if accepted models of sex and sexuality change alongside evolving social climates and institutions of power, then how "natural" can any set of norms really be? Political and social factors outside of the body necessarily play a role in regulating sexual expression. Butler, too, asserts the significance of recognizing the changing, impermanent nature of maintaining a performative identity, stating that "it will be necessary to think of the symbolic as the temporalized regulation of signification, and not as a quasi-permanent structure" (*Bodies That Matter* 22). Orlando utilizes time in her own understanding of her behavior, deeming the regulatory force within and around her "the spirit of the age," and recognizing that any specific age has its own constraints on identity.

As Orlando lives through so many different eras, Woolf also highlights the role of history and time in altering ideas around sexuality and influencing Orlando's evolving process of performativity. In his article "Fact and Fantasy in Orlando: Virginia Woolf's Manuscript Revisions," Charles G. Hoffman recognizes the significance of the piece's historical breadth in representing identity:

> The 'Truth' of history is achieved by making those different aspects of Orlando's self reflect the changing temperaments of the Sackvilles as prototypes of the times from the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages to the present, 1928...she [Woolf] utilizes the passage of four centuries of historical time...in portraying the psychological continuity of a character's past heritage and present personality (436).

Hoffman emphasizes *Orlando's* role as a historical document meant to convey different eras of aristocratic England through fictional representations of Vita Sackville-West's bloodline. Yet, Hoffman also notes that in doing so, Woolf highlights the influence of an ever-shifting historical moment on the construction of a "psychological continuity" of the self, of a "present personality." As Orlando observes time passing, she details the impact that the shifting social climate has had on the people around her, particularly in terms of expectations for the sexes. At one point, Orlando notes that "stealthily, and imperceptibly, none marking the exact day or hour of the change, the constitution of England was altered and nobody knew it Everywhere the effects were felt...the home....was completely altered" (Woolf, *Orlando* 228). Much as the prevalent customs and values of the age have shifted discretely, gradually, so too does Orlando notice the roles of the sexes shifting drastically before her eyes. "The sexes drew further and further apart. No open conversation was tolerated...The life of the average woman was a succession of childbirths" (229).

Orlando finds the newly reinforced division between the sexes symbolized by the kind of dress that men and women now commonly sport revolting: "The incongruity of the objects...the garishness of the different colours and their plaid-like juxtapositions afflicted Orlando with the most profound dismay. She had never, in all her life, seen anything at once so indecent, so hideous, and so monumental" (232). It is precisely the adamancy with which the difference between the sexes is displayed and performed which disgusts Orlando, who practically reels back in horror as she notices that time has found new ways of perpetuating and policing identities based upon a strict sexual binary. Although Orlando is made distraught by the changes to

society's conception of sex over time, she is not immune to their effects, becoming wholly indoctrinated herself in the customs of the present times.

> [S]he passed Buckingham Palace and her eyes seemed forced by a superior power down upon her knees. Suddenly she saw with a start that she was wearing black breeches. She never ceased blushing till she had reached her country house, which...will be taken, we hope, as a signal proof of her chastity....Once there she followed what had now become the most imperious need of her nature and wrapped herself as well as she could in a damask quilt (233).

When confronted explicitly with a symbol of law, the Palace, Orlando finds herself flooded with a new awareness of her dress as inappropriate. Despite the fact that she had been wearing the breeches happily only moments before, Orlando is overcome by the presence of power and an awareness that her outward presentation marks her as somehow outside of the law. As Orlando blushes (out of a feminine chastity, the biographer claims), Woolf suggests that she has managed rapidly to internalize the same standards of clothing that she had once found so abhorrent, illustrating how over time, and when faced with a regulatory power, the individual becomes necessarily implicated in and responsible for the maintenance of shifting performative demands.

4. Heterosexual Melancholy in Orlando

Because the idea of temporality is so prominent throughout Orlando, and because the book is written in the guise of a fictional "biography" or "history," I want in closing to look at time as it functions to shape the plot, allowing for the events taking place in Orlando's life around her transformation. Since Orlando is so phantasmagoric, it may be somewhat difficult to conceive of the plot in terms of a traditionally linear narrative; Orlando's identity, as we have seen, is sporadic and cyclical, occasionally transforming radically and then turning back in on itself. Certainly, Orlando's supposed sex change seems too fantastical, too impossibly strange to understand in any one register. I will argue, however, that Judith Butler's theory of heterosexual

melancholy provides one framework through which one may understand the broader symbolic implications of Orlando's transition from man to woman, and suggests as one possible cause of the event something that otherwise may not capture our attention. For an explanation of Orlando's quite literal shift from one sex to another, I turn to the idea of "heterosexual melancholy," in which desires for the same sex are rejected in order to reinforce a heterosexual identity.

Judith Butler's notion of melancholy (partially derived from her interpretations of Freud) describes a process whereby one takes on gendered traits of the forbidden (usually homosexual) object of desire as a way of refusing to grieve over the impossibility of that desire while necessarily rejecting it sexually or romantically. Abjected homosexual feelings exist within a heterosexual society, as Butler explains it, a way of "performing the impossible within the possible" (*Bodies That Matter* 234). Butler uses the exampled drag to illustrate heterosexual melancholy, as:

> ...the melancholy by which a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love; a feminine gender is formed (taken on, assumed,) through the incorporative fantasy by which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love an exclusion never grieved but 'preserved' through the heightening of feminine identification itself. In this sense, the 'truest' lesbian melancholic is the strictly straight woman (235).

In this way, Butler argues, an individual immersed in a heterosexual society learns to embody the sexed characteristics of those loves deemed "impossible" as a way of both refusing a forbidden impulse and dealing with emotions which he or she refuses to mourn. This suggests, paradoxically, that the individual who appears to abide most strictly by the rules of their proscribed sex contain within him or herself the most accumulated amount of ungrieved, forbidden homosexual impulses.

In line with Butler's idea of heterosexual melancholy, Orlando's transformation into a woman takes place shortly after Orlando, too, is confronted with the impossibility of realizing a love. When abandoned by Sasha, the androgynous woman with whom Orlando had planned to run away, Orlando undergoes a period of intense melancholy in which he (at the time, presumably male) shuts himself away from the world instead, and, after this period of mourning, attempts to repress or erase the memories of Sasha which now pained him greatly:

> [I]n that summer Orlando retired to his great house in complete solitude...He lay as if in a trance, without perceptible breathing...he did not wake, take food, or show any sign of life for several days...some change, it was suspected, must have taken place in the chambers of hid brain...he appeared to have an imperfect recollection of his past life (Woolf, *Orlando* 66).

Here, Orlando first appears to show signs of lovesick grief, falling into depressed apathy, but then emerges quite a changed person, having altered the narrative of his own "past life." His refusal to acknowledge his desire for Sasha mirrors an individual's refusal to admit to a forbidden desire, or continue properly to mourn its loss. Much like a heterosexual who denies any homosexual desire, Orlando, after undergoing a period of emotional blankness, a small spell of death, manages to deny his former feelings for Sasha, the trauma of his "past life" as her lover.

Having convinced himself that Sasha had never existed, despite the fact that she was, at one point, an enormous presence in his emotional and physical life, Orlando abruptly refuses to grieve any longer:

When the events of the past six months were discussed, he seemed not so much distressed as puzzled, as if he were troubled by confused memories of some time long gone or were trying to recall stories told him by another...if Russia was mentioned or Princesses or ships, he would fall into a gloom of an unesay kind and get up and look out of the window or call one of the dogs to him, or take a knife and carve a piece of cedar wood (67).

Although Orlando seems almost entirely to have rejected memories of his feelings for Sasha, he maintains a residue of this suppressed loss at the mention of her or her homeland, suggesting that

the feelings have not merely vanished. Rather, as with those individuals who Butler claims have rejected homosexual desire, these feelings have been channeled into a somewhat distant, ambiguous, melancholic feeling. Interestingly, because Orlando's attraction to Sasha's androgyny qualifies their relationship, as I have already argued, as a decidedly queer one, Orlando's brand of melancholy works on two levels; on one level, Orlando rejects and represses the deviant, homosexual potential of his attraction to Sasha, entranced in part by her "masculine" characteristics. On another level, because Orlando regards Sasha "truly" as a "woman" despite the queerness of their attraction, a rejection of his queer desire for Sasha also involves a rejection of women as a romantic object, triggering his change into a woman himself.

After the incident with Sasha, Orlando develops a new relationship with love and women, one founded primarily on fear, anger, and an ultimate rejection of emotion. Orlando, rather than pursuing another love of the same intensity as his feelings for Sasha, turns to reading and writing, or seemingly fleeting and ultimately insignificant relationships in which Orlando explicitly rejects love for women. On a rare occasion of actually recalling Sasha's face while trying to write, something which drove "venom into him," Orlando observes as "the ink spurted over the table, which act....at once substituted for the face of the Princess a face of a very different sort...'This is the face of that rather fat, shabby man who sat in Twitchett's ever so many years ago....he had the most amazing eyes...[a] poet, I dare say'" (79-80). Significantly, even though it is not explicitly romantic or sexual, Orlando's ultimate expression of his inner anger and repression of his former love directly manifest themselves into the image of a male poet, suggesting not only a replacement or concealment of his love for Sasha with writing, but also, potentially, the beginning of a shift from woman as love-object to man as love-object, foreshadowing Orlando's ultimate transition into a woman who desires men. With this image of

Sasha's face fading into the poet's, Woolf links the incident with Sasha explicitly with a rejection of sexual desire for women in favor of one for both men and poetry, the loves that eventually come to define her identity as a woman.

Certainly, even as a man, Orlando never allows himself to love a woman with the same intensity as he did Sasha, coming to see love of women as having "two faces; one white, one black; two bodies, one smooth, the other hairy..." and, when a woman Orlando begins to love would come near him, "she wheeled about, turned the other way round; showed herself black, hairy, bruish...[h]ence, he fled" (118). Fleeing his repressed loss of Sasha, Orlando comes to flee his own country, setting off a chain of events which lead up to his mystical transformation. Orlando was a man when he loved Sasha, yet his desire for her (arguably already queer as a result of her androgyny, as I have mentioned) seems to embody the same kind of forbidden love-object that is the subject of rejected homosexual desire characteristic of heterosexual melancholy. Ultimately, Orlando's rejection and repression of his love for Sasha, leading to a certain rejection of love for women (and thus a movement away from the heterosexual matrix), seems to result in an extreme "taking on" of feminine characteristics that Butler attributes to the female melancholic who refuses to accept her love of women. In Woolf's depiction of Orlando, heterosexual melancholy manifests itself in a surreally tangible form, as Orlando takes on so many characteristics of his rejected love that he actually somehow *becomes* a woman himself.

After speaking a great deal about how Orlando "allegedly" or "presumably" becomes a woman, and at risk of stating the obvious, I want again in closing to reflect on the role of the biographical narrator in both shaping the story and destabilizing what he invokes regularly as the notion of Truth (including the Truth of sex or the Truth of identity). At one point in the novel, Orlando asks, "if literature is not the Bride and Bedfellow of Truth, what is she?" (101).

The narrative continuously refers to Orlando's biographer's obsession with uncovering a real or objective truth, something which, in context, seems both humorous and highly implausible in the context of a subject supposed to live for hundreds of years and involuntarily switch sexes part way through, "some weeks" adding "a century to his age, others no more than three seconds at most" (99). The effect, then, is that Truth is degraded and decentered (or, as Butler might say, abjected); the idea of an objective Truth loses its sanctity as its authority is repeated and appealed to in the context of these incredibly bizarre and unrealistic situations to which Truth seems not to apply, and, moreover, not to matter.

The biographer, admitting remorsefully to his (or her, for there has understandably been much debate about the undisclosed sex of the biographer) difficulties in unearthing the details of the period leading up to Orlando's sex change, claims that it is the "first duty of a biographer" to "plot, without looking right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth; unenticed by flowers; regardless of shade; on and on methodically till we fall plump into the grave and write *finis* on the tombstone above our head" (65). Woolf, here, mocks the search for an objective truth as something that is attainable, following fragments of traces until we finally walk ourselves to death in our fruitless pursuit. Moreover, there is a sense that whatever is written by the biographer, and found to be "true" is relatively arbitrary; one could read, for example, a biography about a person who switches sex multiple times over several hundred years and claim it contains and reveals more elements of the truth of a human life or identity than one which traces a relatively ordinary human lifespan, and such a claim could not be deemed objectively incorrect. This perspective is one that has heavily informed my reading of the text; I am not, nor do I believe is Woolf, looking for an objective Truth of the story, but rather am compelled to collect and assemble fragments of experience and being that *ring* true as a part of the human

construction of identity, that are allowed to speak their own subjective truths by virtue of being relieved from the heavy burdens of adhering to one reality, one collectively accepted Truth. In this way, the biographer's understanding of Orlando's life and Orlando's sex mirrors any individual's understanding of the "truth" of sex or any other attribute of society as something that is never objective, and always situated within a structure of meaning and power that works to construct and reinforce reality. Woolf seems to be arguing that no label or categorization is inarguably more objective or real than the other; while it is quite obvious that the words of the biographer are faulty or at the very least not objectively true, it is significantly less obvious that other designations that have become as naturalized and accepted as the notion of a biological sex are, themselves, simply words that have been constructed by systems of power, and then applied based largely on conjecture, approximation, and a ritualistic citing of norms.

In this way, then, I want to posit that, if *Orlando* teaches us anything concrete about the nature of sex and Truth, it is that the materiality of sex itself is a fantasy of its own, although, admittedly, one which many of us are indoctrinated into believing is objectively true; as Joseph Boone writes, "the masquerade of sexuality becomes...the final 'truth' of subjectivity itself" (203). By writing a book that claims to give us the Truth about an alleged sex change while at the same time refusing to provide us with the physiological "proof" of Orlando's identity, Woolf, is, in fact, providing us with another kind of truth about sex by suggesting that it is less grounded in proof than we might think. Particularly in contrast to the things that remain most constant about Orlando as a character throughout her changes of sex and gender, including her love of dogs and animals, nature and her ancestral estate, sex appears less an individual attribute than a set of polarized scripts. Regardless of society's sexual judgment, Woolf suggests that Orlando is never finally a man or woman (or both at once for that matter), but, simply, Orlando. This ultimate

refusal to reject any category of identity in favor of another reflects Woolf's initial reflections while writing *Orlando* that her text is neither entirely "serious" nor joking, neither entirely reality nor fantasy. Even within the text, parody and melancholy, as well as pain and laughter, exist together in order to represent the experience of an impossible desire, a fantasy which, it is worth mentioning, is inspired by Woolf's real (less tragic, but still to some extent limited or forbidden) desire for Sackville-West.

To finish, I want to stress the significance of reading and creating projects which attempt such a denaturalization of sex. For, one might ask, why does it matter to understand sex as a fantasy? What does Woolf actually achieve by writing a phantasmagoric novel that outlines the performative nature of sex; in fact, does this not perpetuate the same practices which it critiques by repeating the same sexed roles and scripts already so well-established in society? Here, I point to Butler, who claims that it is the very process of repetition and bringing awareness to the nature of these repeated performances which allows for their ultimate disruption:

> As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. This instability is the *de*constituting possibility in the very process of repetition, the power that undoes the very effects by which "sex" is stabilized, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of "sex" into a potentially productive crisis (*Bodies That Matter* 10)

Orlando helps us to see "sex," in its "truest" form as a repeated approximation, a continuous act of citation and mimicry, and because such acts are necessarily imperfect, it is from within this system of repetitive meaning that Butler sees a possibility for the creation of new meaning, beginning with the kind of sexual denaturalization that *Orlando* celebrates. Since we are implicated in these systems of meanings, it is imperative that we recognize our own ability to

affect change from within as well as without, not simply manning a post on the imaginary "outside" of society but recognizing what is at stake in our own performances.

Butler offers an analytical framework for *Orlando* that reveals Woolf's mission to shed light upon the elusive "monster" of society as most present precisely in the places where it most often goes undetected, obscured by concepts of the individual that are really rooted in a presumptuous and dangerous kind of essentialism. Here, I return to the quote with which I opened this chapter: "...society is everything and society is nothing. Society is the most powerful concoction in the world and society has no existence whatsoever. Such monsters the poets and the novelists alone can deal with" (Woolf, *Orlando* 194). In the case of *Orlando*, Woolf illustrates how a reality as intangible and pervasive as "society" may only be made visible via the representation of equally fantastic events that undermine its claim to be "everything," and 'the most powerful concoction in the world."

Conclusion

> *If every performance repeats itself to institute the effect of identity, then every repetition requires an interval* ***between the acts****, as it were, in which risk and excess threaten to disrupt the identity being constituted* (Butler, Imitation and Gender 317).

It is interesting and, I think, important to consider the positions of these texts in terms of the trajectory of Woolf's career:"Phyllis and Rosamond," written before any of Woolf's novels were published, suggests a very early engagement with concepts of gender and performativity. The satirical "A Society" was, interestingly, written shortly before Woolf penned both *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own.* Over fourteen years, Woolf demonstrated repeatedly an investment in playful engagement with serious ideas. The playful performativeness of these texts are, part of what makes them so pertinent to a discussion about questions of sexual subversion and the "undoing" of gender à la Butler. They are markedly different from Woolf's other, most acclaimed works, which, even when dealing with questions of performativity, take on a much more "serious" tone; novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway* do not partake in the lighthearted gender games so prevalent in the pieces I have discussed. Woolf's depictions of performative identity evolved and developed throughout her life; certainly, the decade during which "A Society," *Orlando*, and *A Room of One's Own* were written seem to represent a high point for Woolf in terms of an authorial freedom to pursue experimental forms of writing. Her comfort with using an overtly parodic or satirical tone in order to question the possibility of a "real," natural sex or gender identity is fully evident and on display in the works upon which I have chosen to focus.

This lightheartedness, or, as Showalter would say, "whimsy" with regard to sex and identity sharply recedes as Woolf reaches the end of her life (during these years she is plagued by anxiety about the war and the growing severity of her mental illness), and is replaced by the solemnity and meditative tones that prevail, for example, a decade later in *Three Guineas (*1938)

and *Between the Acts (*1940). Because these more fanciful texts do seem to stand out so starkly amidst Woolf's more somber works, it is imperative that critics neither dismiss them as frivolous nor desperately attempt to interpret them in terms that might readily apply to her more "serious" work; to do so would be a disservice to the unique composition of these pieces, and to ignore the particular possibilities of gender play, performative exposure, and sexual re-imagining that Woolf offers us through these forms. In fact, it is through this type of play that Woolf is able to access and illuminate the risky interfaces "between the acts" of naturalized gender performances.

Moreover, just because it is in these pieces that we see Woolf entering freely the realm of fantasy, parody, or exaggeration, that does not mean we should discredit the real-life applicability of the ideas that Woolf uses these mechanisms to convey. Even scholars who attempt to analyze Woolf's interest in unstable sexual identities find it necessary first theoretically to distance these depictions from the "real," a sort of excuse as to why they are justified in attempting to interpret or analyze Woolf's use of androgyny as a form of sexual fantasy in the first place. This sort of disclaimer is evident as Marilyn Farwell provides a description of Woolf's sexual androgyny not dissimilar from Showalter's, stating that androgyny is "a deep-seated fantasy, a dream of return to the harmony of paradise" (436). Similarly, critic Karen Kaivola reads Woolf's interest in sexual androgyny in *A Room of One's Own* as a wistful and backward-looking meditation on the transcendence of the reality of sex, describing it as "a Romantic androgynous fusion that seems to transcend gender and the body altogether"(236).

To look at Woolf's portrayals of sexual fluidity only in the service of (in Showalter's words) an "inhuman" or "utopian" ideal of sexual equality is to ignore the ways in which Woolf uses fantasy and parody to reveal the fantastic nature of the very real, incredibly human conventions surrounding sex and gender. My work with Butler has proven particularly helpful in

bridging this perceived gap between Woolf's use of fantasy and real-world systems of sex, gender, and sexuality, allowing me to unearth an alternative "reality." The performative nature of sexual identity can be overlooked with a refusal to take fantasy and gender play seriously, or an insistence on conceptual distance between Woolf's portrayals of sex and our own experiences as sexed beings. Particularly in a time where concepts of sex and gender have become accepted as more fluid than ever, it seems important to re-imagine and reevaluate what Woolf contributes to current discourse by presenting fluctuating and divergent accounts of gendered identity. According to Butler, it is precisely this incoherence, this fantastic possibility of instability, of seeing sex as something "imaginary," which presents an opportunity for the emergence of real methods of subversion and sexual re-imagination.

Butler underscores the usefulness of projects such as Woolf's which set out to question and expand the limits of accepted sexual categories, ultimately pointing to the possibilities for newly transgressive forms of signification. For Butler, it is this type of performative demonstration that these naturalized categories can fail "fully to describe the constituency that they name [that] is precisely what constitutes these signifiers as sits of phantasmatic investment and discursive rearticulation. It is what opens the signifier to new meanings and new possibilities for political resignification...crucial to a radical notion of democratic futurity" (*Bodies That Matter* 191). In other words, it is only through serious investment in the unthinkable or the unreal, the "phantasmatic," that we may come to radically re-define reality and adopt more inclusive definitions of subjecthood. In *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf states: "Fiction here is more likely to contain truth than fact"(4). I leave this project with, above all, a confidence in the possibilities of fantasy to express, challenge, and change conceptions regarding social "realities"

that are otherwise nearly inarticulable or unobservable by encouraging exploration "between the acts" of identity.

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