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Gender and Social Critique in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Room of One's Own*, *Orlando*

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Introduction

The general aim of this thesis is to discuss gender, gender roles, social conventions, and consequences on women in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway, A Room of One's Own,* and *Orlando*. Woolf challenges the traditional understanding of gender and sexuality and suggests a dynamic concept of identity shaped by societal expectations and internal struggle. These works will be analyzed primarily in terms of gender and norms by using some key concepts. This study will demonstrate the ongoing relevance of these works in today's discourse on gender, gender roles, inequity, and feminism. Additionally, this study will explore feminism in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Room of One's Own*.

The first chapter will examine how Woolf illuminates the complexity of identity and feelings while criticizing the restrictive social framework through Clarissa's interactions and her suppressed desire in *Mrs. Dalloway.* Woolf addresses the consequences of gender role conformity and the suppression of sexual and emotional urges by the protagonist.

The second chapter investigates feminism in *A Room of One's Own* and *Mrs. Dalloway* from different perspectives. In *A Room of One's Own*, she uses a narrator to critique boundaries, explicitly pointing to social norms and limitations women experience in education life, writing, and private areas. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, I will analyze several female characters to illustrate their diverse attitudes and approaches within the patriarchal system, demonstrating how Woolf portrays them to critique contemporary society and forward-looking women.

Lastly, the third chapter expands on how the novel portrays gender as a performative and socially constructed term rather than a rigid one. Additionally, it provides some theorists ' ideas on gender and sex. On the other hand, Woolf highlights women's place in society by critiquing the norms.

Chapter I

Gender Roles and Sexual Identity in *Mrs. Dalloway*: Clarissa Dalloway's Repressed Desires and Conflict

1.1 Short Summary of *Mrs. Dalloway*

Mrs. Dalloway, the fourth novel of Woolf, was published in 1925. The book is narrated in third-person omniscient style. The narrator shifts several times between Clarissa, Septimus, and Richard. The narrative begins and ends with Clarissa. The novel is set on a single summer day in the middle of June in 1923 in the lives of two people who do not know each other: Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith through a series of interconnected stories, including those of Septimus Warren Smith, a World War I veteran suffering from shell shock, and Clarissa, an upper-class Londoner, over fifty, charming, self-possessed, who plans and gives a party. Clarissa is the domestic center of the novel. During the day, flashbacks reveal her memories of friendships and relationships. She worries about the choices she made in the past and their effects on her current life. The book explores the notion of time in personal experience. It is possible to view the two characters as opposites of one another.

The novel contains love triangles among Clarissa, Richard Dalloway, Peter Walsh, and Sally Seton. Clarissa is married to Richard Dalloway, a conservative member of Parliament. Then, she turns into Mrs. Dalloway. Mrs. Dalloway prepares an evening party by buying flowers in London streets, managing servants, and mending a dress. While walking around for the flowers, she remembers her late teenage years at Bourton, her family's country home. Peter Walsh, a former suitor, gives her a visit before the party. Clarissa recalls turning down his proposal of marriage during this visit. She wonders what it would be if she married Peter instead of Richard. She remembers some memories with Peter Walsh and Sally Seton, who is a friend of hers, and Peter. Sally is another significant character playing a role in Clarissa's life. They share a kiss in their teenage time, which makes the conventional love story seem farther away. Then the narrator switches to Septimus Warren Smith. With Lucrezia, also known as Rezia, his wife, he is waiting for a visit to the psychiatrist, Sir William Bradshaw. Since Septimus returned from the war, he has endured considerable hardship. At

the end of the novel, Clarissa's party brings together significant characters such as Peter Walsh and, surprisingly, Sally Seton. Following this, they are informed of Septimus Warran Smith's suicide. She is initially annoyed by the news because it disrupts her party. However, after that, she starts to feel concerned about him and spends some time alone in a small room to think about the situation. She realizes how overwhelmed he is. She admires him for deciding to die rather than allow his soul to be imprisoned, which would have compromised his integrity. After this short moment, she returns to the party.

1.2. Clarissa's Relationships

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* explores the complexities of interpersonal interactions through the lens of gender, societal expectation, and individual identity in early 20th-century England. Woolf states that "In this book [Mrs. Dalloway] I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticize the social system and show it at work, at its most intense."[1] Clarissa Dalloway offers a more profound knowledge of the psychological conflicts and societal conventions that influence her experiences through her relationships with Peter Walsh, Richard Dalloway, and Sally Seton. Through her interactions, the author illustrates Clarissa's inner world and her repressed desires. By analyzing the dynamics of Clarissa's relationships, this chapter will demonstrate how Woolf exposes the complex nature of identity and emotional expression, as well as critique restrictive social systems.

1.2.1 Clarissa's Relationship with Richard Dalloway

Virginia Woolf depicts the marriage of Clarissa and Richard Dalloway as a reflection of societal norms and individual constraints. Even though women had some rights at the end of the 19th century, including the ability to work and receive an education, in the first half of the twentieth century and the decades that followed, in which the novel is set, the embodiment of patriarchal tradition persisted. The patriarchal society romanticized women's domestic roles

[1] V. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, New York and London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1978, 2 vols, vol II, 1920-1924, p. 248.

and the conventional family. During this period, women were primarily expected to perform domestic tasks, such as being wives and mothers, while men were expected to be providers and public figures.

Clarissa's choice to marry Richard, an honorable politician, rather than Peter Walsh is consistent with the held cultural belief that women ought to put decorum and stability ahead of ardor and passion in the society of the time. Their relationship dynamics reveal that Clarissa experiences safety and comfort with Richard, who embodies a conservative and straightforward advocate of English culture. Richard also senses that Clarissa chose her because of the easy and luxurious life he can offer. He points out his idea by saying, "Not that she was weak, but she wanted support." The desire for support embodies the post-Victorian and Edwardian perspectives on marriage as a social institution designed to preserve order rather than foster a strong emotional bond.

Nevertheless, while this marriage gives prestige and safety to Clarissa, it causes a loss of identity. At the very beginning of the novel, the main character is introduced by her marital status, "Mrs. Dalloway", instead of her name, Clarissa: "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself."[2] Before being Clarissa, she is "Mrs." i.e., someone else's wife. This prefix implies that being the wife of Richard Dalloway is more important than being herself.[3] According to Johanna Garvey, Clarissa "vacillates between her private self and her public identity as Mrs. Dalloway" because she is "drawn to both sides" of her identity.[4] It illustrates her perception of diminished individuality within the parameters of her marriage.

Besides, Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique reveals Clarissa's internal thoughts and feelings. Woolf became a significant figure in modernist literature thanks to her experimental storytelling style and focus on characters' inner consciousness rather than their exterior environment. The term "stream of consciousness" was used by American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1920) to refer to the continuous stream of thoughts. James uses the following expression to characterize the experience of thinking in *Principles of Psychology* (1890):

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[2] Ibid., p. 3.
[3] P. D. Petrova, "Analysis of the Linguistic Usage of Genders in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway"*, 2020/2021. Available: https://uvadoc.uva.es/bitstream/handle/10324/51214/TFG_F_2021_094.pdf, Accessed 2024, November, p. 10.
[4] J. X. K. Garvey, "Difference and Continuity: The Voices of Mrs. Dalloway", *College English*, vol. 53, no. 1, (1991), pp. 59-76, pp. 69-70.

> Consciousness […] does not appear to itself chopped up in bits […]. It is nothing joined; it flows. A "river" or "stream" are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness.[5]

This method represents a fresh and radical development from the subjectivism of the masterfully constructed novel. It disregards the principles found in traditional storytelling, including chronology, character development, and plot. When reading a work written using the stream-of-consciousness style, the reader finds out that they are writers as well. As a result, it can be argued that the reader functions as a detective, piecing together the fragments of the thoughts of characters, whose processes are dispersed throughout the past, present, and future at the same time. The works of Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf are where this kind of storytelling first appeared in English literature. May Sinclair, another experimental novelist, used the term "stream of consciousness" to apply it to literature for the first time in a review of Richardson.[6]

> Nothing happens. It is just life going on and on. It is Miriam Henderson's stream of consciousness going on and on […]. In identifying herself with this life, which is Miriam's stream of consciousness, Miss Richardson produces her effect of being the first, of getting closer to reality than any of our novelists who are trying so desperately to get close.[7]

Fernald comments that "Sinclair praises the "stream of consciousness" for getting closer to reality."[8] Woolf also searched to present "reality" in a fresh way, capturing what she called the functioning of "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day."[9] Mrs. Dalloway is one of her novels that is considered to reveal her mastery of the stream-of-consciousness technique. Through this technique, readers can recognize the development of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions inside a character's mind. Woolf was able to portray the richness of human experience in a

[5] W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, New York: Henry Holt, 1890, 2 vols, vol. I, p. 239.
[6] A. Fernald, "Introduction", V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* New York: Norton &Company, 2021, pp. ix-xxviii, p. xi.
[7] M. Sinclair, "The Novels of Dorothy Richardson", *The Egoist,* vol.5, no. 4 (1918), pp. 57-59, p. 58.
[8] Fernald, *op. cit*., p. xi.
[9] Ibid.

more accurate way than conventional realist literature, thanks to her merging of the internal and outward worlds. She offers a thorough examination of memory, mental health, and identity by weaving the thoughts of several characters, such as Clarissa Dalloway. Clarissa's reflections on her life decisions, especially her marriage to Richard Dalloway, are among the best illustrations of her internal conflict utilizing Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique:

> But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.[10]

Clarissa's aspirations and fears are revealed to readers through the use of the stream-of-consciousness. This writing style portrays the seamless flow of her thoughts, showing the depth of her internal struggle as she grapples with the societal expectations placed upon her. The statement "this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway; not even Clarissa anymore" reflects the time's prevailing social norms, which frequently perceived women as extensions of their husbands. She thinks of her real self as "invisible; unseen; unknown" in her public role as a wife and societal figure, worrying that she may lose her identity as Clarissa.[11]

Moreover, given the Dalloway's marriage, Richard's conformity to social norms and his position in the government serves as an example of the period's emphasis on accountability and obligation. Since public duties often took precedence over personal wishes, this frequently led to emotional restraint in upper-class marriages. Susan Kingsley Kent indicates that "Conservative and reactionary images of masculinity and femininity emerged as British society sought the establishment of harmonious marital relationships a resolution to the anxieties and political turmoil caused by the Great War"[12] in response to the post-war pressure for reinstatement to normality. Lady Bruton emphasizes as well that Richard Dalloway's

[10] V. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* L. Woolf (ed), New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1953, p. 14.
[11] S. Frank, "Composition and Compilation of Identity in *Mrs Dalloway*", 2018. Available: https://vassarcriticaljournal.vassarspaces.net/issues/195-2/217-2/. Accessed 2025, February.
[12] S. K. Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain New Jerse*y, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 140.

primary obligation is to his nation by saying that "Richard's first duty was to his country."[13] Clarissa's introspection shows that she is aware of this dynamic, highlighting the emotional detachment that can occur when social obligations take precedence over intimate relationships. She reveals that her marriage to Richard lacks passion. One indication of their lack of desire and detachment is their physical distance from each other. They have been sleeping separately, which is the persistence of Richard since one of Clarissa's illnesses. However, although Clarissa's disease stopped, the habit continued.[14] The following highlights the physical distance:

> So the room was an attic; the bed narrow; and lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet […] through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And then at Constantinople, and again and again. She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together.[15]

"There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room"[16] evokes a profound feeling of isolation. Traditionally a forgotten and isolated area of a home, the attic represents Clarissa's exclusion from Richard's world. Clarissa is explicit about her unimpassioned response to men, a response she perceives as a failure and a lack, a guarding of virginity through marriage and motherhood.[17] Despite performing the socially expected responsibilities of wife and mother, Clarissa considers her "virginity preserved through childbirth," a metaphor that emphasizes her sense of emotional and sexual detachment. She admits to failing Richard by underscoring her "cold spirit" in some way related to her wifely responsibilities, most likely in a sexual way. On the other hand, in the last sentence "or of women together", Woolf implies possible

[13] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 168.
[14] H.M. Greenberg, "The Victorian Influence on Virginia Woolf's Domestic Feminist Aesthetic in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*", 2016. Available: https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/etd/424, Accessed 2025, October, pp. 17-18.
[15] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 46.
[16] Ibid., p. 45.
[17] E. Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 36-37.

emotional, erotic connections between same sex. She extends the concept of intimacy beyond heterosexual partnerships.

There are other moments when Clarissa feels isolated. For example, she feels lonely when she finds out that Richard has been invited to Lady Bruton's house to help her with her business. "There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room."[18] Clarissa removes her yellow-feathered hat; she feels an emptiness at the heart of her life. This feeling of emptiness exemplifies her sense of loneliness. She feels she has let Richard down and is not passionate about him. Rachel Bowlby comments that Woolf's imagery of marriage highlights the subtle separations present even in the most apparently harmonious relationships.[19] Despite appearing conventional on the exterior, Clarissa Dalloway's marriage is characterized by an emotional distance.

Besides, the reason for Clarissa's physical distance from men might be connected to the abuse of Virginia Woolf. She was abused incestuously by her, half-brothers, Gerald Duckworth and George Herbert Duckworth. Gerald, who was eighteen at the time, abused her when she was six years old.[20] Louise DeSalvo stated that Virginia revealed harassment to her sister Vanessa, her brother-in-law Clive Bell, Vanessa's husband, her lovers, and her husband, Leonard Woolf. Most significantly, though, she made it public by disclosing it out loud at the Memoir Club.[21] She incorporated it throughout her works as well. In the autobiographical essays collected in "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf wrote of her recollections of Gerald's molestation:

> There was a slab outside the dining room door for standing dishes upon. Once, when I was very small, Gerald Duckworth lifted me onto this, and as I sat there he began to explore my body. I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it - what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must

[18] Ibid., p. 45.
[19] R. Bowlby, *Virginia Woolf Feminist Destinations,* New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988, p. 52.
[20] S. Culver, "Virginia Woolf as an Incest Survivor", *Grand Valley Review*: vol. 6, no.1, article 18 (1990), pp. 68-80, p. 68.
[21] L. DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work,* New York: Ballantine Books, 1989, p. 121.

> have been strong since I still recall it. This seems to show that a feeling about certain parts of the body; how they must not be touched; how it is wrong to allow them to be touched; must be instinctive.[22]

Woolf was also abused by her other half-brother, George, who was twenty-nine at the time, when she was thirteen years old, following the death of her mother. She mentioned his assaults on her in "22 Hyde Park Gate." As Virginia lay in bed attempting to fall asleep, she realized that someone entered her room. She gave the following account:

> Who? I cried.
> Don't be frightened, George whispered. And don't turn on the light, oh beloved!
> Beloved - and flung himself on my bed, and took me in his arms.[23]

De Salvo claims that after Virginia and her sister Vanessa, who George also assaulted, told their doctor about it, the abuse stopped.[24] Additionally, the effects of the sexual abuse at Woolf's early age might have surfaced in the writing of Leonard Woolf, Virginia Woolf's husband. Leonard Woolf began writing the novel *The Wise Virgins* [25] while they were on a honeymoon in Spain. Virginia Woolf and the protagonist, Camilla Lawrence have some characteristic particularly in case of marital and anxiety and occasional dislike of sex. Thus, Leonard Woolf's depiction of Camilla mirrors Virginia's own marital and sexual difficulties.

The emotional separation between Richard and Clarissa is exposed numerous times. Richard is understood to be a conventional, colorless person who is incapable of expressing or experiencing connected emotion.[26] His traditional personality does not allow him to understand or close their distance completely. People consider him to be reliable and conventional, as well as dull and constrained by the aspect of masculinity that prevents him from completely opening up to his wife, Clarissa. This emotional distance is seen in his preference for a gift for Clarissa. Richard feels urged to open up to his wife Clarissa when he

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[22] R. Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 25.
[23] Ibid., p. 111.
[24] De Salvo, *op.cit.* p. 303.
[25] L. Woolf. *The Wise Virgins,* London: Persephone, 1914.
[26] P. Verret, "A Mind of One's Own: Individual Internality vs. Interpersonal Intimacy in *Mrs. Dalloway"*. Available: https://libjournals.mtsu.edu/index.php/scientia/article/download/2270/1328/6020, Accessed 2024, October, p. 4.

hears about Peter Wash's return to London from India because he remembers that "for years had they not spoken of their affections for each other." He decides to buy a gift for Clarissa. Readers know that Peter's arrival is actively on Richard's mind. It is directly pointed out that "He had, once upon a time, been jealous of Peter Walsh; jealous of him and Clarissa."[27] He was envious of Peter Walsh and Clarissa's previous relationship. Peter's arrival may have prompted him to buy a gift for Clarissa and attempt to express his love to her.

Nonetheless, his present choice for Mrs. Dalloway still demonstrates the emotional distance. He follows Hugh and enters the jewelry shop. He has not successfully purchased a gift for her before; therefore, he is nervous about it. The novel mentions it by saying that "he did not trust his taste in gold."[28] He remembers the bracelet; Clarissa never wears it; he bought it two or three years ago. He remembers that it hurts his feelings. Thus, he cannot dare buy jewelry for her. It is a clue that he does not know Clarissa's taste. He decides on flowers instead of buying jewelry.

Flowers are charming and gentle. However, it is witnessed another male presenting flowers to a woman a few pages earlier: Woolf has a sharp sense of sarcasm. Rather than jewelry, Mr. Dalloway chose flowers as a more impersonal gift: "He prefers flowers because they are impersonal in both of their acceptance and giving."[29] Hugh Whitbread also delivered the flowers to Lady Bruton, the old lady who asked help from gentlemen Hugh Whitbread and Richard Dalloway for her business. It demonstrates that flowers are not that much of a personal gift. Richard dares not to break a quiet agreement with Clarissa and make any scenario intimate or risky. Woolf describes Richard carrying his flowers "like a weapon"[30] that he likewise uses the flowers as a weapon to prevent himself from telling his wife he loves her. He is scared to act spontaneously and instinctively. It seems counterintuitive that flowers serve as a stand-in and protection against equally lovely, natural declarations of love. Additionally, he believes purchasing jewelry for their wife is "worthless" in life. However, Clarissa has an affinity for jewelry since it evokes a sense of brilliance and complements the magnificence of her events. Their opinion about jewelry differs.

[27] Ibid., p. 176.
[28] Ibid., p. 174.
[29] Verret, *op. cit*., p. 14.
[30] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 176.

On the other hand, Richard's incapacity to say "I love you" is a is statement that highlights the boundaries of their partnership. Peter, who is compared to Richard, verbalizes that Richard loves Clarissa**.** However, there are no direct sentences in which Richard tells Clarissa that "I love you" in the novel. Richard plans to tell Clarissa he loves her to overcome his ongoing formality and insecurity.[31] Nonetheless, he is too restrained to say it in the end. The reason partially is that it has been so long since he last said it. He planned to say this word.

> Indeed, his own life was a miracle; let him make no mistake about it; here he was, in the prime of life, walking to his house in Westminster to tell Clarissa that he loved her. Happiness is this he thought.[32]

Yet, in this gift-giving fantasy, he focuses more on delivering the present than the scene's mood. This includes expressing compassion and showing worth. His way of thinking gives the feeling that he is trying to motivate himself to be able to say "I love you" to his wife. However, he was not able to say it. "He had not said "I love you" but held her hand. Happiness is this, is this, he thought."[33] He replaces the words "I love you" to have Clarissa's hand. His description of happiness changed according to his actions. It sounds like he is trying to convince himself.

Following the action, Richard returns to where he feels most comfortable: "But Richard was already at the House of Commons; at his committee, having settled all her difficulties."[34] Richard runs away from his relationship with Clarissa and moves to his comfort zone. It exposes their emotional distance one more time. When presented with challenges, Richard avoids them. No matter how highly society regards him, he cannot express his love for Clarissa. Their marriage, particularly, is viewed as emotional cowardice on Clarissa's part, with Julia Briggs declaring that "her marriage is close and loving, yet passionless."[35] However, although Clarissa and Richard's marriage undergoes a crisis with Peter's coming, it results in a resolution for them. Clarissa thinks about her possible relationship with Peter.

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[31] Ibid., pp. 174-176.
[32] Ibid., p. 174.
[33] Ibid., p. 180.
[34] Ibid., p. 182.
[35] J. Briggs, "'What a Lark! What a Plunge!': *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)." In *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life,* New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2005, p. 149.

Yet, she again realizes that Peter would not give her the little independence she wants. He would not be the correct choice for her. Kiely suggests that she was into her marriage as it gave her the allowance to give herself to others.[36]

Clarissa believes that a bit of independence and privacy are essential in marriage. This marriage gives Clarissa a little bit of independence. Clarissa's wish for slight freedom in their marriage is not a common belief in the early twentieth century. The following citation highlights Clarissa's idea on it:

> And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect — something, after all, priceless.[37]

Clarissa Dalloway emphasizes the unavoidable loneliness that people experience, even in close bonds like marriage. However, in these lines, this feeling of loneliness is presented as a necessary component of one's own dignity and self-respect rather than as a weakness. Woolf depicts marriage as a finely balanced union of intimacy and autonomy.

> For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him. (Where was he this morning for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.) [38]

This passage further demonstrates that a marriage is a partnership that is based on respect for each other's personal space and independence. Woolf's female protagonists, like Clarissa, frequently negotiate a gap between the private need for self-sovereignty and the social expectations of emotional intimacy in marriage. According to Woolf's new perspective on

[36] R. Kiely, *Beyond Egotism, The Fiction of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and D.H Lawrence,* Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980, p. 129.
[37] Woolf, Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 181.
[38] Ibid., p.10.

marriage, a happy marriage creates space for independence, encourages questioning of established norms, and emphasizes respecting each other's autonomy.

1.2.2 Clarissa's Relationship with Peter Walsh

Clarissa's ex-suitor and teenage year friend, Peter Walsh, differs from Richard Dalloway in the case of social rank, stability, and character. He is unstable, critical, and prone to outbursts of temper. He does not suit Clarissa's choice to adhere to stability and socially acceptable standards. For this reason, in the end, Clarissa chooses Richard. She refuses Peter's proposal of marriage in gratitude for Richard Dalloway's stability and the freedom he grants her.

Rather than thinking about what would have been if Clarissa had not married, she evaluates her previous relationships. Given the societal circumstances of the time, the story frames marriage as Clarissa's most probable option. That is why, instead of thinking about what would be if she did not marry, she evaluates her previous relationships. She constantly wonders what might have happened if she had been Peter Walsh's wife. After she rejected him, "[…] she had borne about with her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish […]."[39]After many years of rejecting Peter's marriage proposal, Clarissa sees Peter. She is surprised that Peter comes to visit her. Her reaction is that:

> Now the door opened, and in came — for a single second she could not remember what he was called! so surprised she was to see him, so glad, so shy, so utterly taken aback to have Peter Walsh come to her unexpectedly in the morning! (She had not read his letter.)[40]

She thinks, "If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!"[41] However, these words do not represent reality. The novel contains passages that demonstrate how Peter's personality, lack of manners, self-control, and conventionalism, would never correspond with Clarissa's pragmatic outlook on life. One of his weaknesses is outlined below:

[39] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 10.
[40] Ibid., p. 59-60.
[41] Ibid., p. 68.

> She flattered him; she fooled him, thought Clarissa, shaping the woman, the wife of the Major in the Indian Army, with three strokes of a knife. What a waste! What a folly! All his life long, Peter had been fooled like that; first getting sent down from Oxford; next marrying the girl on the boat going out to India; now the wife of a Major in the Indian Army — thank Heaven she had refused to marry him![42]

Clarissa points out that women can easily deceive him by providing various examples. She needs someone like Richard Dalloway to bring some steadiness to her life. The paragraph reveals that Peter is not able to give her the life she requires. Clarissa voices the justice of her decision once again by uttering, "Thank Heaven she had refused to marry him!"[43] She also often told Richard that "she had been right not to marry Peter Walsh."[44]

On the other hand, Peter was so passionately in love with Clarissa. When Clarissa Parry and Peter Walsh were younger, their connection was characterized by mutual understanding and enjoyment of one another's companionship: "They had always this queer power of communicating without words",[45] as if "They went in and out of each other's minds without any effort."[46] Both of them had benefited from their friendship, which influenced their personal growth. Clarissa said, "It was Peter who had helped her; Peter who had lent her books",[47] and she stated that "She had influenced him more than any person he had ever known."[48] Yet, for Clarissa, the intimacy of the relationship grew increasingly oppressive to her. She is uneasy about herself and struggles to express her hidden emotions. The paragraph below shows her efforts to hide her inner thoughts and feelings:

> She had helped young people, who were grateful to her; had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her — faults, jealousies,

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., p. 10.
[45] Ibid., p. 90.
[46] Ibid., p. 94.
[47] Ibid., p. 192.
[48] Ibid.

> vanities, suspicions, like this of Lady Bruton not asking her to lunch; which, she thought (combing her hair finally), is utterly base! [49]

She tries not to show her feelings. She is not a person who readily shares her inner thoughts. Additionally, in the paragraph, it is evident that she dislikes Lady Bruton's attitude, as she invites her husband, Richard, to lunch without first inviting her. However, she does not share her ideas or feelings about it with her husband.

On the other hand, Peter knows her very well and perceives her beyond the social mask she presents. It is pointed out in the novel by saying, "He always saw through Clarissa."[50] She thinks that Peter is judgmental of her. She says, "he always criticizes me."[51] Through Clarissa, Peter comes to perceive the delusions of London society. He thinks "Lord, lord, the snobbery of the English! Thought Peter Walsh, standing in the corner. How they loved dressing up in gold lace and doing homage!"[52] when he witnesses the respect shown to the Prime Minister at Clarissa's party. He also takes issue with her choice to wed Richard. He accused Clarissa of carrying financial safety and social status:

> How he scolded her! How they argued! She would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said.[53]

He evaluates her saying: "She was worldly; cared too much for rank and society and getting on in the world – which was true in a sense; she had admitted it to him."[54] Still, he despises Clarissa's bourgeois lifestyle, while he blames Richard for shaping her into the woman she is today. He believes that Clarissa has prioritized social norms over her own happiness. In Clarissa's opinion, "love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul", [55] and Peter's persistent character in sharing everything would mentally exhaust Clarissa. Hence, "she had to break with him, or they would have been destroyed, both of them

[49] Ibid., p. 55.
[50] Ibid., p. 90.
[51] Ibid., p. 60.
[52] Ibid., p. 262.
[53] Ibid., pp. 9-10.
[54] Ibid., p. 115.
[55] Ibid., p. 192.

ruined, she was convinced; […].”[56] It claims that Peter's intense romantic ideals could have overwhelmed Clarissa's individualism. Clarissa’s refusal of him was an act of self-preservation. Clarissa would not have had any personal space left in Peter’s all-encompassing love for herself. Even his most subtly critical comments, such as the one about her green dress, are picked up by Clarissa, and his opinions have a significant impact on how she feels about her life and decisions. Even after many years, sometimes she thinks about their disagreements: “because she wanted his good opinion so much, perhaps”.[57]

Moreover, due to his insecurity and unresolved hurt, Peter is highly judgmental of other characters, particularly Richard and Clarissa Dalloway. He criticizes the others harshly, yet he is unable to recognize his inadequacies. However, society criticizes his personality and lack of success. After being severely hurt by Clarissa’s rejection, Peter immediately departed and went to India. Many years later, when he returns, he is still satisfied neither in matters of love nor in the business world. He has not succeeded. In the novel, he is seen as a man who “could not keep out of smoking rooms, liked colonels, liked golf, liked bridge, and above all women’s society.”[58] After a failed marriage, he is now in love with Daisy, a married woman. People criticize his love choice as her fiancé is married. They relate his love choices with his devotion to women. Comparatively speaking, Peter would rather consider himself to be “an adventurer, reckless, […] swift, daring, indeed (landed as he was last night from India) a romantic buccaneer […].”[59] However, Peter is aware that Clarissa “would think me a failure, which I am in their sense, he thought; in the Dalloway’s sense.”[60] He shares Clarissa’s desire to win her approval. Yet, despite her rejection of Peter for a variety of reasons, she continues to consider the potential consequences of their marriage. Peter’s visit causes a change in her feelings:

> She had felt a great deal; had for a moment, when she kissed his hand, regretted, envied him even, remembered possibly (for he saw her look it) something he had said – how they would change the world if she married him perhaps; [. . .][61]

[56] Ibid., p. 10.
[57] Ibid., p. 53.
[58] Ibid., p. 241.
[59] Ibid., p. 80.
[60] Ibid., p. 64.
[61] Ibid., p. 236.

While he was crying, she kissed his hand. Hearing about his second marriage to Daisy made her jealous once more. In the book, there is a hint of jealousy: "But in her heart, she felt, all the same, he is in love. He has that, she felt; he is in love."[62] She keeps saying to herself, "He was in love! Not with her. With some younger woman, of course."[63] She believes that Daisy "flattered him; she fooled him […] All his life long, Peter had been fooled like that […]."[64] She finds it unbearable to consider that he could be in love with someone else, disapproves of his general selection of women, and tells about Daisy:

> But look at the women he loved – vulgar, trivial, commonplace. Think of Peter in love – he came to see her after all these years, and what did he talk about? Himself. Horrible passion! she thought. Degrading passion[!][65]

It becomes clear that "Peter Walsh also features in Clarissa's reminiscences (as she in his), representing the romantic hero rejected in favor of the conventionality personified by the Conservative Member of Parliament." [66] However, she eventually concluded that their marriage would not be successful or happy. She cherishes the memories of their youth, but she could never have accepted him as an equal partner, considering Peter to be "not the sort of man one had to respect – which was a mercy [. . .]."[67] The reason is that he is impulsive, possessive, and immature in his passionate demands.; Clarissa, by contrast, is very reserved and does not allow herself to follow the dictates of her heart because she fears the destructive force of love: "Love destroyed too. Everything that was fine, everything that was true went." [68] Nevertheless, their separation has left a lasting impact on the lives of both. They may also have left a gap in their lives. Clarissa even thinks about Peter more than Richard.

[62] Ibid., p. 67.
[63] Ibid., p. 67.
[64] Ibid., p. 68.
[65] Ibid., p. 192.
[66] Bowlby, *op. cit*., p. 89.
[67] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 237.
[68] Ibid., p. 192.

1.2.3 Clarissa's Relationship with Sally Seton

The relationship between Clarissa Dalloway and Sally Seton offers a deep examination of gender roles and sexual identity, shedding light on Clarissa's repressed homosexual desires within the boundaries of early 20th-century English society. Sally Seton is a significant figure in Clarissa's lifespan. Clarissa has the most intimate relationship with Sally Seton compared to Peter Walsh and Richard Dalloway.

Clarissa remembered Sally Seton as a wild, dark-haired, rebellious woman and a cigarette smoker. Sally's attitude accepted as inappropriate at that time shocked Helena, Clarissa's aunt. For example: "For in those days she was completely reckless; did the most idiotic things out of bravado; bicycled round the parapet on the terrace; smoked cigars."[69] Once, Sally ran through Bourton's corridor while completely nude. Bourton is where the main character, Mrs. Dalloway, grew up. It was her home thirty years ago. It is the place in which her memories with Sally Seton and Peter Walsh take place. Clarissa is fascinated by Sally's rebellious spirit because it gives her an idea of an alternative lifestyle that opposes the expectations of early 20th-century society. She is described as "Absurd, she was — very absurd."[70] Clarissa started to read Shelley and Plato for hours with the influence of Sally. They planned on changing the world together. They wrote a letter about abolishing private property: "They meant to found a society to abolish private property, and had a letter written, though not sent out."[71]

However, they have not sent it since they were never going to risk their social standing. According to Jesse Wolfe, the book "participates in a modern trend in British and European social thought that combines pragmatic-conservative solutions with anti-foundational forebodings".[72] Clarissa's pragmatic approach and wish to be accepted by society are seen as her choice of marrying Richard Dalloway and being "Mrs. Richard Dalloway". The institution of marriage conceals Clarissa's sexual orientation and her attraction to women.[73] However,

[69] Ibid., p. 50.
[70] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., pp. 50-51.
[71] Ibid., p. 49.
[72] J. Wolfe, "The Sane Woman in the Attic: Sexuality and Self authorship in *Mrs. Dalloway*", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol 51, no.1 (2005), pp. 34-35.
[73] A. M. Lacabe, "Clarissa's Passion". Available: https://escholarship.org/content/qt5x15x7nz/qt5x15x7nz_noSplash_c0f3ab1cac344f945e0721391ce6c87b.pdf, Accessed 2024, December, p. 1.

Clarissa is not the only one who pursues the social convention and marries; Sally gets married as well, although she sees "marriage always a catastrophe."[74] In contrast to her wild and disobedient childhood, Sally marries a wealthy man and has five boys. Similar to Clarissa, she conforms to social expectations and accepts her roles as mother and wife.[75] Through Sally's transformation into a conventional wife and Clarissa, Woolf illustrates the impact of society on women.

Sally represented a time in Clarissa's life when she was free to pursue her personality and desires without concern for societal norms and rejections. Clarissa's memories of her close relationship with Sally underscore her desire for a more meaningful and genuine connection that her marriage to Richard does not provide. She recalls Sally and her kiss. The passage that follows explains her intense emotion:

> But she could remember going cold with excitement, and doing her hair in a kind of ecstasy (now the old feeling began to come back to her, as she took out her hairpins, laid them on the dressing table, and began to do her hair), with the rooks flaunting up and down in the pink evening light, and dressing, and going downstairs, and feeling as she crossed the hall "if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy." That was her feeling — Othello's feeling, and she felt it, she was convinced, as strongly as Shakespeare meant Othello to feel it, all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton![76]

Readers can infer from this passage how Clarissa feels about her. She was impatient to see her. She put on a white dress. Woolf uses a line from Shakespeare's *Othello*, "If it were now to die, twere now to be most happy,"[77] to explain her affection for Sally. This sentence in *Othello* illustrates the depth of her emotions. In the play, Othello passionately loves Desdemona, his wife, but he ultimately murders her out of misplaced jealousy. After being tormented by remorse, he commits suicide. By comparing Sally to Desdemona and herself to Othello, Clarissa alludes to the magnitude of her emotions as well as the fact that she destroyed

[74] Woolf, *op.cit*., p. 50.
[75] Petrova, *op.cit*., p. 20.
[76] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 51.
[77] W. Shakespeare, *Othello The Moor of Venice,* St. Paul, Minnesota: EMC/ Paradigm, 2005, Act II, Scene I, p. 57.

any chance of being in love with Sally and, consequently, a part of herself. Merve Emre discusses that Othello's metaphor used by Woolf foreshadows the unhappiness that will soon arrive.[78] Othello's suspicion of Desdemona, Clarissa's marriage to Richard, and the loss of the intensity of desire is an unsettling assertion of contentment. Clarissa uses the line as a teenager for its amorous impulses rather than its premonition.[79] The kiss is an essential scene demonstrating the depth of Clarissa and Sally's association. The moment of kiss is defined in the paragraph:

> Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it — a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling![80]

The most beautiful moment of Clarissa's life happened one evening on the Bourton terrace when Sally gave her a flower and kissed her on the lips. Clarissa defines the kiss as a religious, holy experience. It is a very intimate moment; for her, there is no one except the two of them. On the other hand, the kiss represents genuine emotional and physical intimacy that contrasts sharply with the restrained and emotional aloof nature of her relationship with Richard. In support of this, Elizabeth Abels suggests that "Woolf organizes the developmental plot so that Clarissa's love for Sally precedes her alliances with men […]."[81]

Besides, this passionate interaction points out homosexuality in the novel. However, some critics, such as Jesse Wolfe, concur that the perception of Clarissa's romantic relationship with Sally Seton as a youthful event unrelated to her real sexual orientation is warranted.[82] Wolfe interprets love for Sally as "a passing phase of late-adolescent lesbian enthusiasm" and claims to divide Clarissa's love between Peter Walsh and Richard

[78] Ibid.
[79] M. Emre, *The Annotated Mrs. Dalloway,* New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021, p. 57.
[80] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 30.
[81] Abel, *op. cit*., p.32.
[82] Lacabe, *op. cit*., p. 3.

Dalloway.[83] Furthermore, in his book *Feminist Destinations*, Bowlby notes Abel's concept, which parallels Wolfe's:

> In a stimulating essay on Mrs. Dalloway, Elizabeth Abel says that the novel 'demonstrates the common literary prefiguration of psychoanalytic doctrine, which can retroactively articulate patterns implicit in the literary text'. [84] Recapitulating the difficulty of the development towards 'normal' heterosexual femininity as described by Freud, Abel reads the conclusion as Clarissa's belated acceptance, thirty years after the events, of her 'choice' of Richard over the pre-Oedipal female bonding of her relationship with Sally Seton.[85]

The core of Freud's theory of sexuality is fundamentally centered on the Oedipus Complex, which he regarded as a universal stage in gender identity development. The Oedipus Complex is a part of the phallic stage, the third stage of Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud mainly focused on the psychological development of boys. According to Freud's theory, young boys develop an early, unconscious desire and attachment to their mothers that carries sexual connotations. At that point, the father establishes a clear boundary between mother and child and prevents the possibility of an incest relationship. This paternal intervention forms the foundation of civilization by enforcing a prohibition that compels the child to leave his pre-Oedipal attachment. As a result, the male child transitions from desiring his mother to identifying with his father, ultimately directing his desires toward women outside the family, thus conforming to Freud's implicit model of adult male heterosexuality.[86]

A similar process occurs in female development, where the young girl initially experiences an unconscious desire for her father, a desire to emulate or replace her mother. Carl Jung, a student of Freud, referred to the progress of girls as the Electra Complex. Yet, like a male child, the girl also must abandon this early attachment; instead, she internalizes the maternal identity and seeks relationships beyond her familial structure. In Freud's model,

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[83] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 36.
[84] E. Abel, "Narrative Structure(s) and Female Development: The Case of *Mrs. Dalloway*", Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Landgland (ed), *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983, p. 171.
[85] Bowlby, *op. cit*., pp. 87-88.
[86] J. Rivkin and M. Ryan, *Literary Theory an Anthology* (Third edition), John Wiley &Sons Ltd, 2017, p. 569.

individuals construct their sense of self through internalizing external models and images, shaping their understanding of social expectations and gender roles.[87]

Based on Elizabeth Abel's examination of Freud's beliefs given regarding female development, this interpretation offers that Clarissa Dalloway's ultimate acceptance of her marriage to Richard thirty years later represents a delayed reconciliation with the heteronormative frameworks that were imposed over her. Clarissa comprehended the psychological and social factors that impacted her decision to choose Richard over the passionate, pre-Oedipal female closeness she had with Sally Seton.

Nonetheless, after many years, at age fifty-two, she thinks about her in her room.[88] Thoughts from Clarissa clearly show her devotion towards Sally:

> But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relationship in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love? [89]

It might indicate that interacting with a female is not just a pre-Oedipal act for Clarissa. The reason for this is that she is an adult the moment she thinks about Sally and feels sexual desire.

Through the characters of Sally and Clarissa, Woolf argues that love between women fosters the feminine identity and recognizes the inherent feminism in lesbian relationships.[90] Clarissa defines her relationship with Sally:

> The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense of being in league together […][91]

[87] Rivkin and Ryan, *op. cit*., p. 570.
[88] Ibid., p. 3.
[89] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 48.
[90] Greenberg, *op. cit*., p. 19.
[91] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 50.

However, although Clarissa has the uncommon sensation of passion towards Sally, she settles into a familiar and safe relationship and marries Richard. Sally married to a wealthy man as well. Social norms influenced both of them.[92] Clarissa's decision to get married mainly stems from the fact that she lives in a culture that urges heterosexuality. In her article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Adrienne Rich notes:

> Women have married because it was necessary, in order, to survive economically, in order to have children would not suffer economic deprivation or social ostracism, in order to remain respectable, in order to do what was expected of women […] and because heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment.[93]

Like Rich's thoughts mentioned above, Steven Seidman also expresses that society advocates "compulsory heterosexuality" as an accepted standard. Thus, anything different is viewed as abnormal. [94] Both writers address society's expectations of women and mandatory heterosexuality.

Nonetheless, despite society's beliefs, Woolf describes sensual moments between women. The paragraph below reveals queer erotic desires:

> [Y]et she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly […], she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt […]. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check, and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But

[92] Petrova, *op. cit*., p. 8.
[93] A. Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", *Signs,* vol. 5, no. 4 (1980), pp.631-660, p. 654.
[94] S. Seidman, "Critique of Compulsory Heterosexuality", *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, vol. 6, n. 1 (2009), p.18.

> the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over—the moment. Against such moments (with women too) there contrasted (as she laid her hat down) the bed and Baron Marbot and the candle half-burnt.[95]

It examines the intense moment of same-sex desire that Clarissa Dalloway had. Yet, Woolf describes this moment as fleeting, saying, "But the hard softened; the close withdrew." The moment was over. The description of the match in the crocus is an image of active female desire; Woolf's language conveys a passion […][96] Abel comments on the paragraph below:

> Clarissa's momentary illumination, moreover, is made possible only by the sexual orientation Freud devalues as (initially) immature and (subsequently) deviant. Woolf's passage suggests the completeness Freud denies the pre-Oedipal realm and calls into question the differentiation of normal from aberrant sexuality.[97]

This sexually metaphorical moment of "revelation," while Clarissa alludes to her desire for women, generates more ambiguity.[98] Additionally, Clarissa says that: "[...] she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that." The quotation refuses to identify her as "this" or "that" and refuses to elaborate for her a "true self," a metaphysics, of sexual identity.[99] Further, Emre points out that some reviewers regarded Woolf's description of the event as an orgasmic rush.[100] The reason is that the language Woolf uses mirrors the emotional and physical intensities commonly associated with an orgasm. She employs sensory words such as "quivered," "swollen," and "gushed and poured." These words evoke physical sensations.

However, this is a perilous circumstance. Thinking about the sores and cracks, the thin skin separating, and the relief from fluid ejection that resembles pus more than anything else. The association of sexual ecstasy with illness, the imagination of sexuality as a wound or a rupture - this mingling of attraction and repulsion makes a great deal of sense in a novel where

[95] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway,* cit., p. 47.
[96] Abel, *op. cit*., p.37.
[97] Ibid.
[98] J. Berman & J. Goldman, "Novel Possibilities: Re-Reading Sexuality and "Madness", in *Mrs. Dalloway",* in Virginia Woolf Out of Bounds, New York: Pace University Press, 2001, pp. 19-24, p. 20.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Emre, *op. cit*., p. 54.

many characters suppress their gay urges such as Clarissa's love for Sally Seton.[101] She does not think about her husband; instead, the gestures evoke her enthusiasm for Sally rather than her heteronormative duty to Richard. Furthermore, it is known that early 20th-century medical literature regarding homosexuality had an impact on Virginia Woolf. In her article *Unmasking Lesbian Passion*, Eileen Barret writes that Virginia Woolf "was aware of competing discourses about lesbianism and homosexuality" and "was not immune to the prevailing condemnation of homosexuality."[102]

On top of that, when Woolf's personal life is considered, her homosexual interaction is revealed as well. Clarissa might be a counterfigure for her author. In the biography of Woolf, *Virginia Woolf*, Hermione Lee points out Woolf's feminine fellowships and how they became private and intimate:

> When Virginia told Violet Dickinson […] she preferred women, she [was] speaking of the free, private, playful behavior which such relationships allowed her, as well as of her erotic feelings. Here she could be flirtatious, whimsical, physically demonstrative, demanding hugs, and pettings […]. And she could speak her mind and show off and talk about herself as she could not with her father or brothers.[103]

This paragraph suggests that she was comfortable with herself among her sex. The fellowship with women has an erotic effect on her. Moreover, in her diaries, Woolf also wrote frankly about her relationships. One entry written one year and six days after *Mrs. Dalloway*'s publication reads:

> I am amused at my relations with her (Victoria Sackville–West): left so ardent in January – and now what? Also, I like her presence & her beauty. Am I in love

[101] Ibid.
[102] E. Barrett, *Unmasking Lesbian Passion: The Inverted World of Mrs. Dalloway,* New York, NY: New York University Press,1997. In Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings pp. 146-164.
[103] H. Lee, *Virginia Woolf,* New York: Alfred K. Knopf Inc, 1996, p. 158.

with her? But what is love? Her being ‘in love ’(it must be comma’d thus) with me, excites & flatters.[104]

Woolf might have represented her homosexual interaction in her private life through Clarissa’s affair with Sally in the novel.

Overall, Woolf points out themes of gender, sexual identity, and homosexuality through Clarissa's interactions with Sally, Peter, and Richard. As a modernist writer, she employs a stream-of-consciousness technique that allows readers to experience the characters' thoughts directly to reveal Clarissa's inner struggles and conflicts. By conducting Clarissa's flashbacks, the story explores same-sex love as well as the conflict that exists between her private life and her public persona as a wife and mother. Throughout the novel, Woolf critiques societal norms and the rigid expectations placed on women, underlining the tension between individual desires and societal pressures in the 20th century.

[104] V. Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf,* A. O. Bell (ed), San Diego, Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1980, 5 vols, vol III, 1925-1930, p. 86.

Chapter II

Feminism in *A Room of One's Own* and *Mrs. Dalloway*

This chapter will explore Woolf's feminist approaches in different works: the nonfictional *A Room of One's Own* and the fictional Mrs. Dalloway. Woolf critiques the limitations women faced and the patriarchal society of early 20th-century Britain. In both works, feminism will be examined, however, in different lenses. While in *A Room of One's Own*, her criticism of boundaries through a narrator directly points to societal conventions, in *Mrs. Dalloway* she represents different women characters to show their attitudes within the patriarchal system. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, criticism is presented indirectly to the reader through characters who are conventional or ahead of their time. Thus, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *A Room of One's Own* create a multi-layered critique of gendered living in Britain, grounded in both the psychological effects of restriction and the material reality of exclusion.

2.1. Feminist Virginia Woolf

In her family, Woolf experienced patriarchal control and a depressing environment. She criticized male dominance, such as husbands, fathers over women in the family by pointing out these social norms and family dynamics in *Three Guineas* as well: "It was the woman, the human being whose sex made it her sacred duty to sacrifice herself to the father, whom Charlotte Bronté and Elizabeth Barrett had to kill."[105] Through her ideas against patriarchy, she made contributions to feminist theories. There were many feminist-leaning literary magazines during Woolf's time. These include *The Englishwoman*, Dora Marsden and Mary Gawthorpes' *The Freewoman,* Marsden and Harriet Shaw Weaver's *The New Freewoman*, which later became Weaver and Ezra Pound's *The Egoist*, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap's *Little Review*, and Margaret Haig Thomas's *Time and Tid*e. In *Time and Tide*, Woolf published articles, including excerpts from *A Room of One's Own.* Other feminist thinkers influenced her work, including Woolf's mentor, the Cambridge classical anthropologist Jane Harrison (1850–1928), and feminist writer and activist Ray Strachey (1887–1940), who was part of

[105] V. Woolf, *Three Guineas*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc, 1963, p. 134.

Woolf's Bloomsbury circle and wrote *The Cause* (1928), a history of the contemporary British feminist movement.[106] Woolf addressed the social and economic constraints imposed on women while advocating for their intellectual and creative autonomy in her articles and novels. Her feminist views are evident in some of her critical writings, particularly in *A Room of One's Own*, as well as in her novels, such as *Mrs. Dalloway.*

2.2. Overview of *A Room of One's Own*

A Room of One's Own is a lengthy feminist essay published for the first time in 1929. Mark Hussey's book had the following description of *A Room of One's Own*, which might have been written by Woolf herself:

> This largely fictitious essay is based on the visit of an outsider to a university. It expresses the thoughts suggested by comparing the different standards of luxury at a man's college and a woman's. This leads to a sketch of women's circumstances in the past, and the effect of those circumstances upon their writing. The favorable conditions for imaginative work are discussed, including the right relation of the sexes. Finally, an attempt is made to outline the present state of affairs and to forecast what effect comparative freedom and independence will have upon women's artistic work in the future.[107]

This passage, taking place in the first edition, which was published by Hogarth Press in 1929, gives an overview of the essay. The article is based on lectures given by Woolf at Cambridge University's Girton College and Newham College in September 1928. Jane Godman comments on the book: "The book is based on lectures Woolf gave to women students at Cambridge, but its innovatory style makes it read in places like a novel, blurring boundaries between criticism and fiction."[108] Woolf highlights inequalities in women's access to education in this essay. The narrator begins by sharing her day at a college within the

[106] J. Goldman, "The Feminist Criticism of Virginia Woolf", G. Plain & S. Sellers (ed), *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 66-84, p. 67.
[107] M. Hussey, *Virginia Woolf A to Z,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 233.
[108] Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

imaginary Oxbridge University, which is a combination of Oxford and Cambridge. She reveals the disparities in educational opportunities offered to women and men. Then she visits the British Library. However, she realized a lack of women writing and how much literature is dominated by men and male perspectives. She criticizes this inequality and patriarchy. The essay suggests that women require financial freedom and personal space to write and create without restrictions.

2.3. Feminism in *A Room of One's Own*

This section will examine the limitations women faced in patriarchal society, particularly in the fields of education, literature, and culture as explored in *A Room of One's Own.* These limitations are not only physical but also mental. Woolf starts to demonstrate the inequality women experience at the outset of the essay. Firstly, in the opening, the narrator, Marry Beton, states that she visited an Oxbridge college and was not allowed entry to the library due to her gender. These limits illustrate how women are marginalized by patriarchal society, institutional control, and gendered space. Women were not able to access the same facilities just because of their sex. Physically, they were limited from entering some public areas by a patriarchal figure. When the narrator arrives at Oxbridge, she sits by the river and considers the issue of women and fiction. As she is deep in thought, a "Beadle," "a ceremonial officer of a church or college,"[109] shoos her off the grass, a privilege solely for the College's Fellows and Scholars. The scene is described as follows:

> His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path.[110]

In the excerpt, Woolf focuses on patriarchy, exercising its dominance spatially.[111] The Beadle refers to patriarchal authority limiting the spaces of women. His "fear and outrage" at the woman's presence demonstrates that a woman who disobeys the law has triggered an emotion

[109] C. Soanes & S. Hawker, *Compact Oxford English Dictionary for Students*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 76.
[110] V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, London: Hogarth Press, 1935, p. 9.
[111] A. Snaith & M. H. Whitworth, *Locating Woolf: The Politics of Space and Place*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 33.

in him that is beyond rationality.[112] The journey through "Oxbridge" employs fictitious territorial borders to illustrate a metaphor of women being barred from the citadels of masculine authority. The male hegemony in all facets of cultural power is symbolized by the universities that do not admit women. It shows that space perpetuates the supremacy of patriarchy. Snaith and Whitworth indicate patriarchy's spatial rule in some of Woolf's works:

> Woolf's work is rife with awareness of spatial practices, and of women's relation to privilege in terms of space: the division of rooms and roles in Hyde Park Gate; the chapel at Cambridge where Jacob fumes against the distracting presence of women; a woman's 'sudden splitting off of consciousness […] in walking down Whitehall'; the 'kind of glory' Woolf ironically details as she walks through Admiralty Arch (ROO 127, 50). These and countless others suggest her heightened awareness of patriarchy's spatial rule.[113]

The writer exemplifies Woolf's critique of gendered places and patriarchy in her other works. Woolf emphasizes how women are metaphorically and physically excluded from intellectual and social spheres such as the university, the home, and public spaces.

Beyond the restriction of women, Woolf illustrates the impoverishment of women's colleges in *A Room of One's Own* as a necessary consequence of years of patriarchal control over the "material" financing of these establishments as well.[114] She shows evidence from Fernham. It is a fictitious representation of Newnham College of the University of Cambridge. Newnham, founded in 1871, was the first college to allow women to attend the university. However, the opportunities were not the same for women. In the essay, the narrator makes a comparison between the poverty of her dinner at a more recently founded women's institution, Fernham, and the magnificent richness of her lunch at a men's college. The narrator precisely describes the luncheon at the men's college:

> Here, however, I shall take the liberty to defy that convention and to tell you that the lunch on this occasion began with soles, sunk in a deep dish, over which the

[112] Bowlby, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[113] Snaith & Whitworth, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[114] Bowlby, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

> college cook had spread a counterpane of the whitest cream, save that it was branded here and there with brown spots like the spots on the flanks of a doe. After that came the partridges, but if this suggests a couple of bald, brown birds on a plate you are mistaken. The partridges, many and various, came with all their retinue of sauces and salads, the sharp and the sweet, each in its order; their potatoes, thin as coins but not so hard; their sprouts, foliated as rosebuds but more succulent. And no sooner had the roast and its retinue been done with than the silent serving-man, the Beadle himself perhaps in a milder manifestation, set before us, wreathed in napkins, a confection which rose all sugar from the waves. To call it pudding and so relate it to rice and tapioca would be an insult. Meanwhile, the wineglasses had flushed yellow and flushed crimson; had been emptied; had been filled. And thus by degrees was lit, half-way down the spine, which is the seat of the soul, not that hard little electric light which we call brilliance, as it pops in and out upon our lips, but the more profound, subtle and subterranean glow which is the rich yellow flame of rational intercourse.[115]

In this part of the book, Woolf employs a detailed depiction of a university luncheon of men to highlight the clear distinction between the academic lives of men and women in early 20th-century England. As shown by their actual consumption of food, Woolf criticizes the privilege that men receive at prestigious institutions. This paragraph also provides a comparison with women's nourishment and, implicitly, the opportunities enabled for women. The section that follows details the supper at the women's institution:

> Here was my soup. Dinner was being served in the great dining-hall. Far from being spring it was in fact an evening in October. Everybody was assembled in the big dining-room. Dinner was ready. Here was the soup. It was a plain gravy soup. There was nothing to stir the fancy in that. One could have seen through the transparent liquid any pattern that there might have been on the plate itself. But there was no pattern. The plate was plain. Next came beef with its attendant greens and potatoes—a homely trinity, suggesting the rumps of cattle in a muddy market, and sprouts curled and yellowed at the edge, and bargaining and cheapening, and

[115] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* cit., pp. 16-17.

> women with string bags on Monday morning. There was no reason to complain of human nature's daily food, seeing that the supply was sufficient and coal-miners doubtless were sitting down to less. Prunes and custard followed. And if anyone complains that prunes, even when mitigated by custard, are an uncharitable vegetable (fruit they are not), stringy as a miser's heart and exuding a fluid such as might run in misers' veins who have denied themselves wine and warmth for eighty years and yet not given to the poor, he should reflect that there are people whose charity embraces even the prune. Biscuits and cheese came next, and here the water-jug was liberally passed round, for it is the nature of biscuits to be dry, and these were biscuits to the core. That was all. The meal was over. Everybody scraped their chairs back; the swing-doors swung violently to and fro; soon the hall was emptied of every sign of food and made ready no doubt for breakfast next morning. Down corridors and up staircases the youth of England went banging and singing. And was it for a guest, a stranger (for I had no more right here in Fernham than in Trinity or Somerville or Girton or Newnham or Christchurch), to say, "The dinner was not good," or to say (we were now, Mary Seton and I, in her sitting-room), […][116]

This paragraph underlines the differences between meals at men's and women's colleges. In the previous paragraph, the narrator gives detailed descriptions of meals by indicating their richness. However, this paragraph reveals the poverty of women's meals at the college and the inequality of opportunities provided to men and women. Woolf criticizes the disparity, indicating questions:

> Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? What effect has poverty on fiction? What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art? —a thousand questions at once suggested themselves.[117]

[116] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* cit., pp. 26-28.
[117] Ibid., p. 38.

Woolf questions the reasons for the contrast and their consequences on "works of art." Then, she states that material conditions are essential to the growth of the mind and the capacity for creativity. This account is the foundation for the book's main materialist argument: "intellectual freedom depends upon material things."[118] She says that "One cannot think well, love well, sleep well if one has not dined well."[119] The arguments she provides point out the relationship between nourishment and intellectual life. The social systems deprive the necessary conditions for women to flourish academically and artistically. Women have limitations in creating.

In this context, it would be appropriate to mention the term Woolf created to indicate the material foundation of writing. She forms an image of a spider's web known in literary criticism as "Virginia's web" to show the material basis of literary production. She uses the metaphor in order to illustrate the link between literary creation and real life. Through this image, Woolf emphasizes that even imaginative fiction pieces are grounded in material reality. She states:

> […] fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible; Shakespeare's plays, for instance, seem to hang there complete by themselves. But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in.[120]

As Bowlby points out, this approach suggests literary materialism.[121] Godman claims that writing is "the work of suffering human beings," implying that literature is created either in protest against or as a means of making up for existential sorrow and material deprivation.[122] Woolf indicates the connection by claiming that literature "is the work of suffering human beings" and that it relies on "grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we

[118] Ibid., p. 63.
[119] Ibid., p. 28.
[120] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* cit., pp. 62-63.
[121] Bowlby, *op. cit*., p. 18.
[122] Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

live in." It acknowledges that writing is a material art form, not something that is supernatural or provided by God. However, the quotation implies that the attachment is frequently hardly noticeable.

On the other hand, Woolf mentions Shakespeare as an example. She claims that his plays hang there all by themselves. However, "it is fallacious, she says, to think of Shakespeare as if he dropped from the sky: great works of literature."[123] Woolf appears to be trying to demythologize the romantic, lonesome figure of the male author, such as Shakespeare or a poet, as being chosen by God or mystically singled out.[124] By mentioning Shakespeare, who is accepted as one of the most well-known and talented poets, she advocates that great work is not only the production of talent but is a consequence of economic and social factors as well. To prove that she cites the imaginary representative case of Shakespeare's sister, Judith Shakespeare, who is as talented as her brother. However, she is unable to succeed like Shakespeare due to the social factors and limitations imposed on women.

> […] but what is true in it, so it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. No girl could have walked to London and stood at a stage door and forced her way into the presence of actor-managers without doing herself a violence and suffering an anguish which may have been irrational—for chastity may be a fetish invented) by certain societies for unknown reasons—but were none the less inevitable.[125]

Bowlby denounces the suppression of women and women writing in the novel: "Woolf cites the imaginary representative case of Shakespeare's sister endowed with gifts equal to her

[123] Bowlby, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[124] Goldman*, op. cit.*, p. 73.
[125] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* cit., pp. 74-75.

brother's but unable, because of the position of women at that time, to make anything of them."[126] She criticizes the difficulties and taboos for women in Shakespeare's time. She points out the inequality between women and men, even when they possess the same qualities. According to her, "any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at." In this line, she emphasizes the damaging social and mental consequences of being a talented woman. She claims that talented women are "thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts." Therefore, they would not have been able to protect either their sanity or their health. With this paragraph, Woolf once again criticizes the patriarchal society, injustice, and oppression done to women. Additionally, in these lines where she gives the Shakespeare's sister example, Woolf indicates again that her spider's web offers that writing is a bodily process, physically produced.

Furthermore, Woolf highlights the disparity in the value placed on men and women. Each sex has its values "naturally," however, once this is accepted, it is uncertain how or why the values applied by one sex end up being more important than those of the other.[127] Woolf utilizes the following expression to convey the value difference:

> And since a novel has this correspondence to real life, its values are to some extent those of real life. But it is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are "important"; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes "trivial". And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battle-field is more important than a scene in a shop—everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists. The whole structure, therefore, of the early nineteenth-century novel was raised, if one was a woman, by a mind which was

[126] Bowlby, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[127] Bowlby, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

slightly pulled from the straight, and made to alter its clear vision in deference to external authority.[128]

The passage claims that men and women differ naturally. It does not inquire as to whether "the other sex" played a role in the distinction between "important" and "trivial," which raises questions about their relative importance.[129] Woolf criticizes the male domination of literary and societal norms by remarking that "football and sport are "important"; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes, "trivial."" She illustrates how society's norms affect literary standards. She indicates that the value depended on what patriarchal society accepted as worth in the 19th century. According to her, women writers had to "alter [their] clear vision" to fulfill the male criteria of magnitude. As a result of it, women's creative voices were compromised.

Later, as a solution to the deprivation of material stuff and freedom of women, Woolf suggests the well-known argument of the essay: "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."[130] Snodgrass explains Woolf's words, "To focus on the need for female self-expression, she pictures autonomy as spaced rooms free of domestic intrusions in which women can actualize their creative urges."[131] Woolf claims that the privacy of one's own room may allow women to create unhindered. The reason for her idea is that a lack of financial support and privacy causes limitations on women's writing. Woolf is not only concerned with a room alone. She uses the metaphor for the room not only for a room alone but also for equal access to education, career opportunities, and financial security. The room metaphor represents the expansion of women into domains that were previously thought to be of men, as well as the proclamation of political and cultural, both public and private space for women.[132]

Woof further addresses the status of women as readers. The narrator goes to the British Museum following the discrimination she experiences as a woman. She researches Women and Poverty in the British Museum under a patriarchal text structure. Woolf discusses women's coerced, subservient participation in the patriarchal subject's building here.

[128] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own, cit.*, pp. 110-111.
[129] Bowlby, *op. cit*., p. 24.
[130] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own, cit.*, p. 6.
[131] M. E. Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature,* New York: Facts on File, 2006, pp. 475-476.
[132] Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

> Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle. The glories of all our wars would be unknown. We should still be scratching the outlines of deer on the remains of mutton bones and bartering flints for sheep skins or whatever simple ornament took our unsophisticated taste. Supermen and Fingers of Destiny would never have existed. The Czar and the Kaiser would never have worn crowns or lost them. Whatever may be their use in civilized societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic actions. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. That serves to explain in part the necessity that women so often are to men.[133]

Virginia Woolf employs the metaphor of women as "looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" to attack the social frameworks that place women in service to males. Woolf demonstrates how women's social roles have been minimized to confirm male superiority and authority. She uncovers women's subjugation as a requirement for male achievement and heroism by noting that leaders like Napoleon and Mussolini used the notion of female inferiority to substantiate their authority.

Additionally, Woolf explains the challenges a female reader faces when coming across the first-person pronoun in "Mr. A's" novels. She provides a clearer example: a shadow appeared on the paper.

> It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter "I". […] Back one was always hailed to the letter "I". […] in the shadow of the letter "I" all is shapeless as mist. Is that a tree? No, it is a woman. [134]

Women writers in the nineteenth century faced significant challenges due to the absence of a female tradition. It highlights the alienation felt by female readers of texts written by men. This shadowing or eliminating of the feminine in the representation and construction of

[133] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* cit., pp. 53-54.
[134] Ibid., p. 150.

subjectivity also raises questions about the linguistic challenges faced by female writers who attempt to convey feminine subjectivity in a language that appears to have already excluded them.[135] At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the most common sentence was "a man's sentence." According to the reasoning, the word "I" automatically denotes a masculine self when it is written. It appears that when a male writes "I," a woman is placed in its shadow, as though women are not allowed to write or utilize the first-person singular in the language: "That is a man's sentence; behind it, one can see Johnson, Gibbon, and the rest. It was a sentence that was unsuited for a woman's use."[136] In this instance, Woolf asserts through Mary Beton that women must write using gendered sentence structures, i.e., feminine syntax, and that "the book has somehow to be adapted to the body."[137] Here, Woolf considers the lack of representation of the women writing in literature. She foreshadows the concept of écriture féminine, a theory later developed by French feminists, such as Hélène Cixous. Cixous coined this term, écriture féminine, women's writing or feminine writing, in the essay "Le Rire de la Méduse" (The Laugh of Medusa) to describe a kind of writing that is outside of the patriarchal discourse. Woolf's and Cixous's arguments for women to write their bodies into language are in line with this focus on stifled female expression and the necessity for new literary forms. As Cixous points out, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing […] by her own movement."[138] Both Woolf and Cixous foresee a feminine writing style that defies established conventions and questions the male-dominated literary past. They argue that women writers have been historically excluded and denied the independence required for creation. She criticizes the male-dominated literary canon while promoting an appreciation of women's unique points of view. Woolf writes as follows: "We think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to the great men writers for help. However, much one may go to them for pleasure".[139] As Cixous indicated, Woolf suggests that female authors should view other female writers as examples as well. They ought to view the works produced by women if they are writing "as women."

Besides *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf wrote some essays related to feminist literary criticism. "Professions for Women" is one of them. In the essay, Woolf analyses the

[135] Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
[136] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* cit., p. 115.
[137] Ibid., p. 117.
[138] H. Cixous, K. Cohen and P. Cohen, "The Laugh of the Medusa", *The University of Chicago Press Journals,* vol. 1, n. 4 (1976), pp. 875-893, p. 875.
[139] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* cit., p. 114.

difficulties women encounter by examining the "Angel in the House" ideal that was supposed to be embodied by women. She argues that women writers must suppress a traditionally domestic and submissive feminine character in a paper she presented to the National Society for Women's Service.[140] She points out submissive patriarchal women suit the term "Angel in the House": "She was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others."[141] Similar to *A Room of One's Own,* she critiques the impact of patriarchy on women's writing by pointing out Victorian values in this essay. "She addresses that before she could write, she had to kill this phantom of Victorian womanhood that dictated that she must be sympathetic to men whose books she was reviewing."[142] She describes her struggle to "kill". Writing and reviewing are impossible without killing it. "Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer."[143] She also adds "Had I not killed her, she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without a mind of your own."[144] She links creativity with the women writing. She writes below:

> I want you to figure to yourselves a girl sitting with a pen in her hand, which for minutes, and indeed for hours, she never dips into the ink pot. The image that comes to my mind when I think of this girl is the image of a fisherman lying sunk in dreams on the verge of a deep lake with a rod held out over the water. She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being. Now came the experience, the experience that I believe to be far commoner with women writers than with men. The line raced through the girl's fingers. Her imagination had rushed away. It had sought the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber. And then there was a smash. There was an explosion. There was foam and confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard. The girl was roused from her dream. She was indeed in a state of the most acute

[140] Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
[141] V. Woolf, "Professions for Women", in *Collected Essays*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1958, pp. 284-289, p. 285.
[142] Hussey, *op. cit.*, p.6.
[143] Woolf, *Professions for Women*, cit., p. 286.
[144] Ibid.

> and difficult distress. To speak without figure she had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men, her reason told her, would be shocked. The consciousness of—what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness. She could write no more. The trance was over. Her imagination could work no longer. This I believe to be a very common experience with women writers—they are impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex. For though men sensibly allow themselves great freedom in these respects, I doubt that they realize or can control the extreme severity with which they condemn such freedom in women.[145]

This passage shows how societal conventions destroy women's creativity. Woolf depicts that patriarchal society does not allow women to write about their body and passion since they are accepted as taboos. Thus, she suggests women discarding these values to write. Moreover, she advocates women can be creative in the way they are themselves, as she points out in *A Room of One's Own.*

Rethinking *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf proposes that genuine artistic creativity arises from an androgynous mind, meaning it defies strict gender norms and balances both masculine and feminine characteristics by blending them. This notion is linked to feminist thought since it opposes the conventional binary view of gender that has long restricted the creativity and intellectuality of both genders in literature and society. The idea of Woolf is demonstrated in the passage given below:

> But the sight of the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave me made me also ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness? And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating. If one is a

[145] Woolf, *Professions for Women*, cit., pp. 287-288.

> man, still the woman part of his brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, I thought. But it would he well to test what one meant by man-womanly, and conversely by woman-manly, by pausing and looking at a book or two.[146]

Mary Beton, the narrator, questions whether the mind has two sexes like the body and "amateurishly" illustrates a perfect union of male and female after seeing a man and a woman board a taxi together outside her window. In the paragraph, she also mentions Samuel Taylor Coleridge's statement that "a great mind is androgynous" may have been intended to convey this kind of union. Woolf had noted Coleridge's thought when she read *The Table Talk* and *Omniana* of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1918, preparing to review it for the *Times Literary Supplement*."[147] Based on the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a paradigm of writerly androgyny is proposed: one must be man-womanly or woman-manly.[148] Woolf uses the idea of androgyny in the essay to support her claim that "sex-consciousness" kills both men's and women's creative instincts.[149] "It is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex," her narrator declares.[150] She states that John Keats, Laurance Sterne, William Cowper, Charles Lamb, and Coleridge were all androgynous and that only Marcel Proust "was holly androgynous, if not perhaps a little too much of a woman" among her fellow artists. She also portrays William Shakespeare as the most androgynous artist.

Yet, some critics argue that Woolf's embrace of androgyny. Elaine Showalter, one of those critics, indicates that "Utopian ideals of androgyny lack zest and energy."[151] She does not find it realistic. She criticizes that Woolf's environment does not allow for showing masculinity and femininity together.[152] Moreover, she states that despite her talent, Woolf was as frustrated and separated as the ladies she writes about in *A Room of One's Own*. She

[146] Woolf, *A Room One's Own,* cit., pp. 147-148.
[147] Hussey, *op. cit.*, p.
[148] Goldman*, op. cit.*, p. 75.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Woolf, *A Room One's Own,* cit., p. 156.
[151] E. Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own,* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 263.
[152] Showalter, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

indicates “Androgyny was the myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition.” [153] By the conclusion of her life, she had returned to the sad, guilt-ridden, suicidal woman.[154]

On the other hand, although the book contains feminist ideas and statements, Woolf draws a reaction to this work. Her portrayal of black women in *A Room of One's Own* is among the most controversial sections. The expression follows: “It is one of the great advantages of being a woman that one can pass even a very fine negress without wishing to make an Englishwoman of her.”[155] With this quotation, she comments on sexual and colonial appetites of men. While attempting to disassociate women from imperialist and colonial actions, Woolf isolates Black women from the category of women.[156] She prioritizes the experiences of white, middle-class women while frequently disregarding the difficulties experienced by working-class women, women of color, and others. However, feminists are both united and divided by the category of women: it has been demonstrated that white middle-class feminists are unable to speak for the experience of all women.[157]

2.4. Feminism in *Mrs. Dalloway*: Analysing Other Women in the Novel

This part of the chapter analyzes feminism in *Mrs. Dalloway* from the perspectives of side women characters. They are revealed in terms of both arriving (or not) at the ultimate, definitive identity and the divergent paths that two generations of women, a mother, Clarissa Dalloway, and a daughter, Elizabeth Dalloway, can take.[158] Compared to her mother, Elizabeth Dalloway is distinct. Mrs. Dalloway is called “a perfect hostess”[159] by her previous lover, Peter Walsh. She follows the traditional path and marries a wealthy, politically powerful man. However, Elizabeth has the opposite behavior. She is a self-reliant and intelligent lady who would rather read than socialize with others.[160] Everything about Elizabeth Dalloway's

[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own,* cit., p. 76.
[156] Goldman*, op. cit.*, p. 77.
[157] V. Smith, ‘Black Feminist Theory and the Representation of the “Other” in Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, Basingstoke: Macmillan,1997.
[158] Bowlby, *op. cit*., pp. 81-82.
[159] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, cit., p. 9.
[160] Petrova, *op.cit*., p. 6.

1923 bus ride along the Strand seems to indicate that she is bringing with her new opportunities for her sex.[161] This lady can go further than her mother, who is still bound to the traditional femininity of the Victorian Angel in the House condemned by Woolf in "Professions for Women."[162]

> Suddenly Elizabeth stepped forward and most competently boarded the omnibus, in front of everybody. She took a seat on top. The impetuous creature—a pirate—started forward, sprang away; she had to hold the rail to steady herself, for a pirate it was, reckless, unscrupulous, bearing down ruthlessly, circumventing dangerously, boldly snatching a passenger, or ignoring a passenger, squeezing eel-like and arrogant in between, and then rushing insolently all sails spread up Whitehall.[163]

Having a bus is a symbolic act. The sentence "Suddenly Elizabeth stepped forward and most competently boarded the omnibus, in front of everybody" points out that Elizabeth enters the public sphere with confidence. Her "competence" refers to the ability of a woman to live in the modern world according to her terms. She takes the initiative, asserts her space, and acts publicly and independently "in front of everybody." In early 20th-century Britain, when it was still predominantly ruled by men, a young woman's self-assured maneuvering through public space was rebellious. However, she does not conform to the passive expectations of the time for young women. In a space that men usually occupy, she acts, leads, and makes decisions in public. Through Elizabeth, Woolf demonstrates a woman does not accept the patriarchal norms. Furthermore, Elizabeth is inspired to imagine a life very different from her mother's by the journey through the city's extraordinary neighborhoods.

> Oh, she would like to go a little further. Another penny was it to the Strand? Here was another penny then. She would go up the Strand. She liked people who were ill. And every profession is open to the women of your generation, said Miss Kilman. So she might be a doctor. She might be a farmer. Animals are often ill. She might own a thousand acres and have people under her. She would go and see

[161] Bowlby, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
[162] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, cit., p. 208.
[163] Ibid., p. 205.

> them in their cottages. This was Somerset House. One might be a very good farmer—and that, strangely enough though Miss Kilman had her share in it, was almost entirely due to Somerset House. It looked so splendid, so serious, that great grey building. And she liked the feeling of people working. She liked those churches, like shapes of grey paper, breasting the stream of the Strand. It was quite different here from Westminster, she thought, getting off at Chancery Lane. It was so serious; it was so busy. In short, she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into Parliament, if she found it necessary, all because of the Strand.[164]

This paragraph reflects the social changes that followed World War I and expansion of roles for women. Miss Kilman's words, "Every profession is open to the women of your generation," approve of this idea. Elizabeth considers the professions traditionally reserved for men, such as being an MP, like her father, that she might have. Her thoughts and attempts may be interpreted as a symbol of female progress because she is unrestrained by male interference and is motivated by ambition beyond what women thirty years ago could have imagined.[165] In this excerpt, while critiquing patriarchal conventions, Woolf also celebrates the new opportunities available to women.

Woolf proposes that Elizabeth transforms into the new woman by combining her mother's compassionate sympathies with her tutor's, Miss Kilman's, cunning and aspirations.[166]Marcus comments on it:

> In *Three Guineas*, Woolf expressed a hope for a generation of independent women united in profession solidarity. By allowing Elizabeth Dalloway a glimpse of that some vision, Woolf suggests that the adolescent girl may yet blossom into a new woman who unites the cleverness and ambition of Miss Kilman with the humane sympathies of someone such as Clarissa.[167]

[164] Ibid., pp. 206-207.
[165] Bowlby, *op. cit*., p. 83.
[166] I. M. Shihada, "A Feminist Perspective of Virginia Woolf's Selected Novels: *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*", 2005. Available: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2645411, Accessed 2024, December, p. 146.
[167] J. Marcus, *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, London: Macmillan, 1981, p. 138.

On the other hand, Clarissa does not like Miss Kilman, Elizabeth's governess. She is a lower-class, single woman. She has German heritage. During the war, her teaching position was terminated due to anti-German sentiment in society. The reason Clarissa dislikes her is that she thinks that Miss Kilman distances Elizabeth from her. Elizabeth's affection for Miss Kilman disturbs Clarissa. Moreover, she has some suspicions and fears of a possible relationship between them. She sees Miss Kilman as "a seducer" of her daughter:

> Kilman her enemy. That was satisfying; that was real. Ah, how she hated her—hot, hypocritical, corrupt; with all that power; Elizabeth's seducer; the woman who had crept in to steal and defile (Richard would say, What nonsense!).[168]

In the novel, the attention of Miss Kilman towards Elizabeth is shown at some point while they are at the tea shop and eating an éclair:

> Miss Kilman opened her mouth, slightly projected her chin, and swallowed down the last inches of the chocolate éclair, then wiped her fingers, and washed the tea round in her cup. She was about to split asunder, she felt. The agony was so terrific. If she could grasp her, if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted. But to sit here, unable to think of anything to say; to see Elizabeth turning against her; to be felt repulsive even by her—it was too much; she could not stand it. The thick fingers curled inwards.[169]

It has been recognized that the relationship between Kilman and Elizabeth sheds light on the sexual characteristics of the previous Clarissa and Sally.[170] These lines remind Mrs. Dalloway's erotic scene when she thinks about Sally in her attic room: "Clarissa's state is again isolated and mirrored (more physically and more grossly) in Kilman, who shortly before her sexual declaration, is described."[171] However, in the end, Clarissa and Sally follow the

[168] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *cit.*, pp. 265-266.
[169] Ibid., pp. 199-200.
[170] K. Moon, "Where Is Clarissa? Doris Kilman and Recoil from the Flesh in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*," *CLA Journal,* vol. 23, no. 3 (1980), pp. 273–86, p. 280.
[171] Moon, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

social conventions that suggest heterosexuality, indicated in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" by Adrienne Rich[172], and get married to men from high society. Clarissa worries that her daughter may choose a different path than she did and diverge from what society expects of her.[173] Through Clarissa's fair Woolf shows the expectation of society in case of relationship.

On the other hand, Richard's reaction differs from Clarissa's. Richard does not take this potential romantic encounter seriously: "But, as Richard stated, it might just be a period that all females go through."[174] Woolf shows patriarchy, the mentality of society towards homosexuality and women by Richard's dismissive reaction. Richard's despising response to his daughter's sexual orientation is typical of men of that era since same-sex women's relationships are "constructed primarily for a straight male gaze," as Gill states in her article "Beyond the Sexualization of Culture."[175] Females' relationships are not considered as scandalous as relationships involving men.

Another mission of Miss Kilman is to highlight the misogyny between the characters. Woolf reveals the difficulties or discrimination women faced not only from men but also from other women. Clarissa mocks the social class, economic situation, appearance, and clothes of Miss. Kilman. She says about Kilman: "Ugly, clumsy, Clarissa Dalloway had laughed at her for being that; […]. She could not help being ugly; she could not afford to buy pretty clothes."[176] Miss. Kilman is opposite of Clarissa. Clarissa belongs to a high level of society. Clarissa is wearing nice clothes and organizing parties at her house with other people from the same social circle. At the same time, Woolf defines the traditional, domestic woman through Clarissa; she introduces Miss Kilman to show a woman does not suit the standards of the time.

Mrs. Dalloway also gains Miss Kilman's hatred because of her insulting manner, and her idea about Clarissa is the result of a patriarchal culture.[177] The following remarks succinctly convey Miss Kilman's resentment of Clarissa:

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[172] Rich, *op. cit*., p. 654.
[173] Petrova, *op. cit*., p. 8.
[174] Ibid., p.15.
[175] R. Gill, "Beyond the 'Sexualization of Culture' Thesis: An Intersectional Analysis of 'Sixpacks', 'Midriffs' and 'Hot Lesbians' in Advertising." *Sexualities*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2009), pp. 137-160, p. 151.
[176] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, cit., pp. 194-195.
[177] Shihada, *op. cit*., p. 133.

> And there rose in her an overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, […][178]

Woolf exposes the conflict between women from different environments by portraying two women's hatred towards each other.

Lady Bruton is another woman character who is distinguished from traditional women such as Lady Bradshaw. Lady Bradshaw, a prototypical Victorian upper-class woman, submits completely to her husband's attempts and allows him to control her. She attends dinner parties like Clarissa's to occupy herself with petty activities. However, Lady Bruton is an aristocrat in her sixties, a patriarchal figure. In contrast to Clarissa and Sally Seton, she remains single and defies social conventions. She does not have patriarchal authority in her life. She takes pride in her social standing, ancient ancestry, and way of life.[179] She aspires to address political and social issues. "Lady Bruton had the reputation of being more interested in politics than people; of talking like a man; […]."[180] She is committed to encouraging English families to emigrate to Canada. Due to her outspoken approach and leadership capacity, Lady Bruton is perceived as a strong, independent woman, which leads to female sexism.[181]

However, she still asks males, Hugh and Richard, for help writing a letter to the Times since she is not able to proper letter. This is a demonstration of the inequalities of educational opportunities offered to men and women. Women were first permitted to attend universities in 1868. However, they encountered more challenges and discrimination than their male peers. This discrimination might be observed in Woolf's life as well. She was tutored in classical Greek and some history courses at King's College and private Latin lessons with Clara Pater, the sister of the English essayist Walter Pater. While the brothers Adrian and Thoby went to Cambridge and received a university education, Sir Leslie Stephan did not offer university degrees for his daughters. "Although women's colleges had been around since the 1860s, they

[178] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, cit., p. 189.
[179] Shihada, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
[180] Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, cit., pp. 159-160.
[181] Petrova, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

were not yet the norm for even the daughters of educated men, an inequity that frustrated and angered Woolf."[182] Despite her family's literate lifestyle and her education, she occasionally presented herself as profoundly uneducated, even ignorant. She asserted she had been "a common reader" throughout her life.[183]

Ultimately, Woolf points out the injustices for women in various spheres, including society, domestic life, and literature. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf criticizes the conventional and material constraints placed on women, defending personal space and financial independence as crucial conditions for female creativity and intellectual freedom. Meanwhile, in Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf demonstrates female characters such as Elizabeth, Miss Kilman, and Lady Bruton who deviate from traditional gender norms, challenging conventional representations of women and offering portrayals of alternative female identities.

[182] Fernald, *op. cit*., p. xvii.
[183] M. Emre, "Introduction", *The Annotated Mrs. Dalloway,* New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021, pp. xi-lxxi, p. xxiv.

Chapter III

Gender Fluidity and Natural Sexuality in *Orlando*: Transcending The Boundaries of Flesh

3.1. Plot

This chapter focuses on how the novel presents gender as a performative and socially constructed term by questioning the strict binary notion of gender upheld by predominantly male tradition. The summary will make it easier to understand Orlando's fluid character, gender transitions, the author's main points, and how she confronts them, which will be examined in detail in the upcoming parts of this chapter. Additionally, it provides background knowledge of the different ages to give an understanding of women's conditions.

Orlando: A Biography was published in 1928. It is the sixth novel by Woolf. The novel explores gender identity, gender performativity, and gender fluidity by incorporating elements of androgyny and defying gender binaries while spanning a wide range of historical periods, from the Elizabethan period (16th century) to the present day (1928). It centers on Orlando, a young member of the aristocracy in the Elizabethan era at the beginning. He has lived for over four centuries. He pursues many romantic interests. He experiences an astonishing transformation from man to woman. She wakes up as a woman, although he lived as a man until his thirties. She thinks about the perks and penalties that come with her new sex. She wonders if a woman's or a man's sexual ecstasy is more intense. When she returns to London, she realizes that it is much more different in the late seventeenth century than as she remembered it more than a century ago. London is a more developed city with a higher population. It begins to grow into a significant trading location. However, in the case of equality, the situation is different. Orlando starts to feel the negative consequences of being a woman. As a woman, Orlando encounters the historical restrictions and boundaries imposed by gender roles in different centuries.

Once the century switches into the Victorian age, Orlando realizes that in this century, the gap between the sexes widens. Women face greater pressure in terms of moral norms. After a while, she believes that she should get married following the conventions of time.

Orlando and Shelmerdine then get married. King Edward replaced Queen Victoria in 1901 as the century went on. Compared to the Victorian era, this century appears to be better for women. Orlando hears an explosion, though, and time shifts once more. Orlando eventually reached 1928, the year the novel was published. Orlando's spouse is returning home. The book closes on Thursday, October 11, 1928, with the twelfth stroke of midnight, Orlando is thirty-six years old.

The narrative is presented from a biographer's point of view, whose duty is to present truthful details about Orlando's life. The narrator constantly cuts the story's flow in order to comments the events from own perspective. For instance, when Orlando cheats on Queen Elizabeth with a young girl, the narrator asks the reader to analyze the context of Orlando's actions: "It was Orlando's fault perhaps; yet after all, are we to blame him? The age was the Elizabethan; their morals were not ours […]."[184] This sentence indicates that morals and norms are not stable. This sentence indicates that morals and norms are not stable. In contrast, they change according to periods. These changes are provided through the protagonist's experiences. Additionally, in the novel, the stream-of-consciousness writing style immerses readers in the protagonist's changing thoughts and feelings, forging an intimate bond with the character's inner world, as seen in *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway.*

3.2. Gender Issues in *Orlando*

Orlando explores gender, gender fluidity, and gender identity through the fantastical journey of its protagonist, who transitions from male to female and lives in different eras spanning from the 16th to the 19th century. This chapter examines how the novel challenges the rigid binary understanding of gender maintained by male-dominated tradition by addressing gender as a performative and socially created term. It uses feminist theory, specifically Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, as well as androgyny. By doing this, Orlando recreates the possibilities of identity outside of the limitations of patriarchy in addition to foreshadowing current discussions in gender theory. Rather than presenting gender as fixed or biologically determined, the work exposes how social expectations impact what to be male or female can mean. Woolf's novel challenges readers to reevaluate the artificial and restrictive nature of

[184] V. Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928, pp. 26, 27.

traditional gender roles as well as the constraints they impose. By criticizing strict dichotomies, this critique creates room for fluid conceptions of gender identity.

Woolf depicts gender as a socially imposed and fluid concept, defying the essentialist idea that it is a biologically determined condition. Essentialism advocates "theories or viewpoints that account for differences between categories by ascribing to them enduring, fixed, and prototypical characteristics. In other words, their essence."[185] Essentialists support the idea that differences arise from biological elements such as hormones, genetics, and brain anatomy. Their theory suggests that biological sex is an innate, unalterable characteristic that determines a person's behavior, thoughts, and interactions with society. Sigmund Freud embodies this essentialist idea, as he advocates the idea that biological sex affects not only gender but also psychological development and place in society. In his essay "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," Freud argues that anatomical differences have psychological effects on the development of boys and girls: " 'Anatomy is Destiny,' to vary a saying of Napoleon's."[186] The phallic stage is the third stage of psychosexual development of Freudian psychoanalysis, spanning the ages of three to six years. During this time, children start to become conscious of their bodies, their genitals, the bodies of other children, the bodies of their parents, and their social roles. Boys have a desire for their moms; girls have a passion for their father. The psychological dynamics between a parent and child change. In this stage, while boys start fearing castration, girls envy of penis. In the end after the Oedipus complex disappears, the urge to have a penis and a child unintentionally helps in preparing a female creature for her subsequent sexual role.[187] Moreover, according to Freud, a girl's Oedipal struggle is more emotionally powerful than a boy's, which could lead to a woman having a less assertive and submissive attitude.

However, Woolf presents her opposing idea of essentialism through the creation of the main character, Orlando, who is androgynous and transforms from a man to a woman. This change can be seen as Woolf's most significant rejection of the traditional binary system. Orlando's transformation from a man into a woman's body is described as follows:

[185] S. Greene, "Biological Determinism and Essentialism", N.A. Naples (ed.), *Companion to feminist studies,* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2021, pp. 13-34, p. 16.
[186] J. Strachey, *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* London: The Hogarth Press, 1961, p. 178.
[187] Ibid., pp. 178-179.

> He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess--he was a woman.[188]

Woolf highlights the fluidity and complexity of gender, challenging the notion of fixed gender identities by using Orlando's experiences.[189] It is evident that Orlando does not exhibit rejection or confusion. The smooth acceptance characterizes his transformation from man to woman. This acceptance is clearly stated: "Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath."[190] He is pleased with the new body: "No human being, since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing."[191]

Furthermore, this effortless acceptance of Orlando highlights the novel's exploration of gender fluidity. Although the transformation is a crucial event in the book, it is shown as almost unimportant and natural. Another example further demonstrates acceptance of the transformation: "Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since."[192] This quotation implies that sexually defined selves or roles are merely costumes and thus readily interchangeable.[193] This interchangeability is evident in the concept of gender fluidity. On the other hand, there is an implication that Orlando changed biologically, not as an identity:

> Orlando had become a woman— there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same. His memory— but in future we must,

[188] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., p. 137.
[189] F. Touil & D. F. Z. Morsli, "Reconstructing of Gender Roles in *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf", 2023/2024. Available: http://dspace.univ-temouchent.edu.dz:8080/bitstream/123456789/5705/1/Reconstructing_of_Gender_Roles_in_Orlando_by_Virginia_Woolf.pdf, Accessed 2025, January, p. 20.
[190] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., p. 138.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid., p. 139.
[193] S. M. Gilbert, "An Introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert", *Orlando: A Biography*, London: Penguin Books, 1993, pp. xi-xxxix, p. xix.

for convention's sake, say 'her' for 'his,' and 'she' for 'he'--her memory then, went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacle. [194]

Instead of a shift in inner identity, Orlando maintains feeling, thinking, and acting like his former self, implying that gender is derived from external social duties rather than a born trait like sex. Woolf defies gender stereotypes by developing characters that are difficult to classify and represent a variety of gender identities. Orlando's transformation is an example of variety since while her sex changes, her identity stays the same at the beginning. Despite physical changes, the protagonist's unchanging inner identity supports Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. In *Gender Trouble,* Butler argues that "The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body."[195] As Butler argues, "gender is not a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time through stylized repetition of acts."[196] Therefore, gender constitutes an act that we continuously perform through recurring behaviors, gestures, speech, clothing, and social standards rather than something fixed. In other words, according to Butler, gender is not an intrinsic reality but a performative process.

Moreover, the sentence from the excerpt, "His memory—but in future we must, for convention's sake, say 'her 'for 'his, 'and 'she 'for 'he'—her memory then, went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacle"[197]—Woolf's narrative explores the fluidity of gender and identity. The narrator switches the pronoun from "he" to "she" after Orlando's transformation into a woman. This change in pronouns stresses gender as a social norm rather than an inherent fact. She decides to call Orlando according to her biological sex, which is seen in her appearance. It is evident the phrase "for convention's sake." Woolf criticizes the fixed nature of linguistic and societal structures that necessitate binary categorization.

[194] Woolf, *Orlando,* cit., p. 137.
[195] J. Butler, "Preface", *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York and London: Routledge, 1999, pp. vii-xxvi, p. xv.
[196] Ibid., p. 179.
[197] Woolf, *Orlando,* cit., p. 138.

Like Butler, Havelock Ellis, the leading "sexology" thinker in England, provides perspectives on gender in his work *The Psychology of Sex*, noting:[198]

> We may not know exactly what sex is, but we do know that it is mutable, with the possibility of one sex being changed into the other sex, that its frontiers are often uncertain, and that there are many stages between a complete male and a complete female.[199]

Havelock Ellis's conception of sex as a flexible category foreshadows later poststructuralist theories, especially Judith Butler's argument that gender is a continuous performance influenced by social expectations and repetition rather than a fixed truth. Similar to Butler, Ellis emphasizes that gender and sex are not rigidly binary opposites but rather occupy a fluid spectrum that is subject to change.

Woolf shares the idea of Ellis and Butler as she challenges the notion of fixed gender identities by highlighting the flexibility and complexity of gender via Orlando. This idea foreshadows Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist assertion that "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine."[200] By saying that, she claims that gender is a socially constructed process rather than a biological existence. Butler explains Beauvoir's approach to the understanding of gender:

> […] Simone de Beauvoir suggests in *The Second Sex* that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one." For Beauvoir, gender is "constructed," but implied in her formulation is an agent, a cogito, who somehow takes on or appropriates that gender and could, in principle, take on some other gender. Is gender as variable and volitional as Beauvoir's account seems to suggest? Can "construction" in such a case be reduced to a form of choice? Beauvoir is clear that one "becomes" a woman, but always under a cultural compulsion to become

[198] Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. xviii.
[199] H. Ellis, *The Psychology of Se*x, Ray Long and Richard R. Smith, 1933, p. 225.
[200] S. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* London: Jonathan Cape Thirty Bedford Square, 1956, p. 273.

> one. And clearly, the compulsion does not come from "sex." There is nothing in her account that guarantees that the "one" who becomes a woman is necessarily female. If "the body is a situation," she claims, there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a discursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along.[201]

As the passage reveals, the ideas of Butler and Beauvoir agree in the case of gender. Both advocate that gender is created throughout time rather than being predetermined at birth. However, as Beauvoir's theory points out in *The Second Sex*, it is primarily founded on binary, in which male and female are two distinct categories, with female being considered the secondary, or "other," sex. Butler does not share Beauvoir's categorization of binary sexes.[202] Butler claims that the heterosexual matrix defines the category of women, meaning that "the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation."[203]

3.3. Androgyny in *Orlando*

Woolf challenges strict binary concepts of identity in Orlando by fusing the concepts of androgyny and gender performativity. As the narrator notes, Orlando's "form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace",[204] emphasizing the combination of masculine and feminine components in a single body. The narrator mentions how Orlando's new version is: "No human being since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing."[205] This synthesis is consistent with Woolf's theoretical understanding of androgyny in *A Room of One's Own*. In the work, in which she promotes the necessity of an "androgynous" mind for creativity and intellectual liberty. In the essay, she advocates that "a mind that is purely masculine cannot

[201] Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
[202] M. Rognstad, "The Representation of Gender in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*", 2012. Available: https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/25325/Rognstad_master.pdf?sequence=1, Accessed 2025, May.
[203] Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[204] Woolf, *Orlando,* cit., p.138.
[205] Ibid., p.138.

create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine, […]."[206] Thus describing her process of enquiry:

> And I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female; and in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is a man, still the woman part of his brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her.[207]

Woolf believes an androgynous person is superior to a person who aligns with traditional feminine or masculine characteristics: "It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties."[208] She considers that performing both genders, male or female, is less difficult for androgynous people. She also quotes Coleridge's sentence "A great mind is androgynous,"indicating that she shares the same idea.[209] She uses the concept of androgyny in the essay to support her claim that "sex-consciousness" kills both men and women's creative instincts.[210] She points out that "[…] it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman, pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly."[211]

Once *Orlando* is reconsidered, as in *A Room of One's Own*, she creates androgynous characters. Orlando, the protagonist, is a crucial example. Yet, in *Orlando*, she uses androgyny to withstand traditional gender by showing fluidity and performativity. The protagonist demonstrates traits that conventionally correspond with both masculinity and femininity. Woolf shapes an androgynous character by using clothing and narrative style. At the beginning of the novel, androgyny is revealed instantaneously in the description of Orlando.

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[206] Woolf, *A Room One's Own,* cit., p. 148.
[207] Ibid., p.147.
[208] Ibid., p.148.
[209] Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Woolf, *A Room One's Own,* cit., pp. 156-157.

> In his lecture on "Femininity", Freud writes: "When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is "male or female?" and you are accustomed to make the distinction with unhesitating certainty". It is precisely this obviousness of "unhesitating certainty" which Orlando withholds from the outset.[212]

The "unhesitating certainty" evoked by Bowlby is shown at the beginning in which Orlando is described:

> The red of the cheeks was covered with peach down; the down on the lips was only a little thicker than the down on the cheeks. The lips themselves were short and slightly drawn back over teeth of an exquisite and almond whiteness. Nothing disturbed the arrowy nose in its short, tense flight; the hair was dark, the ears small, and fitted closely to the head. But, alas, that these catalogues of youthful beauty cannot end without mentioning forehead and eyes. Alas, that people are seldom born devoid of all three; for directly […][213]

The description of Orlando is quite feminine. The description and adjectives such as "the red of the cheeks," "peach down," "almond whiteness," and "arrowy nose" are generally feminine attributes in traditional gender thinking. However, the narrator assures the reader in the first sentence of the novel about Orlando's sex:[214] "He--for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it--was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters."[215] Bowlby suggests that the narrator's persistence of Orlando being male causes uncertainty, and he says, "[...] the denial of a doubt introduces a doubt."[216] In *Virginia Woolf out of Bounds,* Jane de Gay maintains that "A concern to explore the troubled relationship between appearance and reality is also integral to Woolf's consideration of the performance of gender"[217] and is seen in the first sentence of the

[212] Bowlby, *op. cit*., p. 50.
[213] Woolf, *Orlando,* cit., p. 15.
[214] N. Kappke & S. S. Maggio, "Different Though the Sexes Are, They Intermix": Gender Shifts in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography*, *Revista do Gel*, vol.17, no.1 (2020), pp. 138-159, p. 127.
[215] Ibid., p. 13.
[216] Bowlby, *op. cit*., p. 50.
[217] J. Berman & J. Goldman, "[…] though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it: Staging Gender in Woolf's *Orlando"*, *Virginia Woolf out of Bounds*, New York: Pace University Press, 2001, pp. 31-39, p. 32.

narrator. In this instance, Woolf explores gender ambiguities by indicating cross-dressing: the protagonist is characterized as a "really" man, but his clothes "disguise" his sex, almost making him a female impersonator.[218] Therefore, by wearing that garment, Woolf transcends gender norms.

Another character who shows sex ambiguity is Sasha. Orlando meets Sasha before her transformation. He was a man when he first saw her. Her clothes did not enable people to understand her sex from a distance. The scene is described as follows:

> […] 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-coloured velvet, trimmed with some unfamiliar greenish-coloured fur. But these details were obscured by the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from the whole person.[219]

The imaginary biographer who narrates the novel states that "Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us",[220] which is undoubtedly true for *Orlando*. It underscores how gender is performed and reinforced through outward appearance. Despite the sexual ambiguity of her outfit, her behavior seems to classify her as masculine:[221] "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 […]."[222] However, when she comes closer, she is pronounced as a female because of her physical attributes: [223]

> Legs, hands, carriage, were a boy's, but no boy ever had a mouth like that; no boy had those breasts; no boy had eyes which looked as if they had been fished from the bottom of the sea. Finally, coming to a stop and sweeping a curtsey with the

[218] Ibid., p. 31.
[219] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., p. 37.
[220] Ibid., p. 187.
[221] Berman & Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[222] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., p. 38.
[223] Berman & Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

> utmost grace to the King, who was shuffling past on the arm of some Lord-in-waiting, the unknown skater came to a standstill. She was not a handsbreadth off. She was a woman.[224]

The mention of Sasha's breasts appears to identify her as female, although, in the beginning, she is thought not to be a woman, not only because of her distinguished dress but also because of her physical activity. Skating fast is associated with men: "no woman could skate with such speed and vigour--swept almost on tiptoe past him […]."[225] By doing this, Woolf criticizes and shows readers the social conventions and expectations of time. Moreover, the mention of her mouth and eyes ironically supports the idea that if Orlando thinks she's pretty, then she must be a woman.[226] This assumption might indicate rigid heterosexuality, which is accepted as the norm in conventional society. The reason for inference is that the narrator uses the admiration of Orlando, a man, to portray Sasha as a woman. Another reason is that being pretty is generally associated with women.

Archduke Harry is another example that Woolf gives to demonstrate how gender is arbitrary and how sexual identity is fluid. He performs opposite gender from his biological sex by wearing woman's clothes. This is an example of performing a gender, as suggested by Butler. Although Harriet is a man, he disguises himself and looks like a woman thanks to her dress. In the beginning, he hides himself since he likes Orlando who was a man at that time. However, later, he hears that Orlando switched sex. Therefore, Archduke shifts to man clothes. Once again, Woolf uses clothes' changing to show that Archduchess Harriet turns into Archduke Harry after acting in a feminine manner:

> […] — here she turned to present the Archduchess with the salver, and behold — in her place stood a tall gentleman in black. A heap of clothes lay in the fender. She was alone with a man.[227]

Given that "they acted the parts of man and woman for ten minutes with great vigour and then fell into natural discourse," Woolf characterizes the scene after Orlando learns the reality as a

[224] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., p. 38.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Berman & Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[227] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., p. 178.

theatrical performance. Through these dynamics between Orlando and Archduke, Woolf shows that the performance of sexual identity does not always reflect reality. Clothing may convey or cover the underlying sex. To explain, the clothing provides appearances that are similar to those of men or women; a man's clothing might either express masculinity or conceal femininity.[228] Bowlby suggests, "And there are therefore always, potentially, two sexes (at one time, rather than at different times), the one on the surface and the one the underneath."[229]

While using Orlando, Sasha, and Archduke Harriet as examples, it is evident that the narrator announces their sexes since all of them pose a threat to gender norms,[230] "women" are or are presumed to be female; they are people who are appropriately in heterosexual partnerships with "males." Hegemonically speaking, people who are gendered as women are also "supposed" to be feminine, and they define themselves by adhering to feminine norms.[231] Although it is not entirely accepted, the narrator's reasoning that Sasha is female because Orlando, a man, is drawn to her appeals to Butler's observations and attempts to establish a normal, heterosexual subject.[232]Woolf agrees with Butler on the constructiveness of identities when she uses clothing to illustrate how outside factors shape gender.

Moreover, Orlando's numerous clothing changes serve as a metaphor for gender fluidity. As a woman at the time, she improves her capacity for self-adaptation by switching her gender.[233] She changes clothes many times to disguise his or her sex. After his transformation, she wears trousers and is perceived as being like a man. On the other hand, although she sometimes starts to wear a woman's dress, she changes and wears men's clothes again. Her fluidity of dress enables her to transcend the limits between sexes. Immediately following this, the narrator says that Orlando "found it convenient at this time to change frequently from one set of clothes to another." Bowlby explains:

> The fact that she finds it "convenient" indicates that her flexibility is a free choice: though she is a woman, she can choose to look like a·man. This is like the first

[228] Bowlby, *op. cit*., p. 55.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Berman & Goldman, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., p. 220.
[233] Kappke & Maggio, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

description of the relations between clothes and sex in so far as the clothes then make Orlando, to all intents and purposes, a man once more until she puts off her "disguise."[234]

In the 18th century, Orlando changed her clothes again and walked the streets around Leicester Square in male clothing. The narrator points out how fast her gender fluidity shifted: "[...]and then she turned on her heel with extraordinary rapidity; whipped her pearls from her neck, stripped the satins from her back, stood erect in the neat black silk knickerbockers of an ordinary nobleman, […]."[235] Orlando "swept her hat off to her in the manner of a gallant paying his addresses to a lady of fashion in a public place."[236] Then, a woman, Nell, the London prostitute, accepts Orlando. Nell assumes that Orlando is a man. Moreover, Orlando feels like a man when they go to the room: "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."[237] She remembers the feelings of her past experiences as a man when she wore male clothes. On the other hand, she is able to guess the meaning of the woman's acting and behaviour since she was "so lately a woman herself." [238] Here Woolf criticizes stereotypical female movements. Yet, following that, Orlando feels sorry for a woman, and "in the strangest torment of anger, merriment, and pity she flung off all disguise and admitted herself a woman."[239]

When Nell realizes Orlando is a woman biologically, her mood towards her changes. The narrator explains that "it was remarkable how soon, on discovering that they were of the same sex, her manner changed and she dropped her plaintive, appealing ways."[240] Portraying the transformation of a woman towards Orlando, Woolf challenges the idea that people are taught or imposed to behave in a particular manner by showing that culture and society's norms form behaviors according to sex. [241]

[234] Bowlby, *op. cit*., p. 56.
[235] Woolf, *Orlando,* cit., p. 186.
[236] Ibid., pp. 216-217.
[237] Ibid., p. 217.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid., p. 218.
[241] O. Brasovean, "The Queerness of *Orlando*: Judith Butler's Performance and Constructiveness of Gender in Virginia Woolf's novel", 2017/ 2018. Available: https://uvadoc.uva.es/bitstream/handle/10324/33029/TFG_F_2018_6.pdf, Accessed 2025, May, p. 22.

On the other hand, in "Male and Female: A Brief Look at Gender Identity and Androgyny in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography*," Maureen M. Melita suggests that Orlando "does not need to cross-dress or prove her masculinity or femininity, because she truly exists as the other gender."[242] Orlando embodies a dynamic understanding of gender, one that is adaptive and flexible rather than rigid. This fluidity allows her to transcend the boundaries of binary genders. Thus, she is able to adapt to her environment and circumstances. Woolf proves the benefits of this fluidity and change in the lines below:

> She had, it seems, no difficulty in sustaining the different parts, for her sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive; nor can there be any doubt that she reaped a twofold harvest by this device; the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied. For the probity of breeches she exchanged the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally.[243]

Orlando was able to extricate herself from social norms thanks to the acquisition of new perspectives gained from living as both a man and a woman, as well as from her experiences. Orlando is not genderless; however, she alternates feminine and masculine impulses. Therefore, she occasionally achieves androgyny by balancing these two impulses inside herself. "For it was this mixture in her of man and woman, one being uppermost and then the other, that often gave her conduct an unexpected turn."[244]

On the other hand, Woolf does not describe a sudden internal realization or change in Orlando's gender identity when he transforms into a woman. After the transformation, although his sex changes, his gender does not show differences at the beginning. She does not feel like a woman. Woolf points it out:

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[242] M. M. Melita, "Gender Identity and Androgyny in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography*", *Romance Notes*, 2013, vol. 53, no. 2 (2013), pp. 123-133, p. 131.
[243] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., pp. 220-221.
[244] Kappke & Maggio, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

> "Orlando had become a woman — there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity."[245]

Butler comments on this:

> The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.[246]

In the passage, Butler raises serious objections to essentialist and binary conceptions of gender. Butler's idea aligns with Woolf's; Orlando gradually comes to understand what it means to be a woman through social experience, specifically in the way people treat her and other women. This realization notes gender as a social performance, in which being a woman does not depend on biological sex but on how society perceives and reacts to the body. It highlights Butler's theory of gender performativity and Beauvoir's famous line: "One is not born a woman, it became a woman". Woolf examines this idea again in the scene when Orlando wears a woman's dress, "the dress of a young Englishwoman of rank,"[247] for the first time. Clothing plays a crucial role in gender representation and society's understanding.

> It is a strange fact, but a true one, that up to this moment she had scarcely given her sex a thought. Perhaps the Turkish trousers which she had hitherto worn had done something to distract her thoughts [...][248]

[245] Woolf, *Orlando,* cit*.,* p. 138.
[246] Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[247] Woolf, *Orlando*, p.153.
[248] Ibid.

This quote signifies that gender identity is not determined only by biological sex but rather by social codings, such as the wearing of a skirt and the captain's change in behavior. The captain shows greatest politeness. The other reason this scene is important is that it marks the first time Orlando feels like a woman, not only because she wears women's clothes but also because of the captain's reaction to her as a woman. The narrator points out that "it was not until she felt the coil of skirts about her legs and the captain offered, with the greatest politeness, to have an awning spread for her on deck, that she realized with a start the penalties and privileges of her position."[249] The captain's kind offer might be considered an advantage of being a woman. However, the dress is heavy, making it difficult to wear and move freely, especially for Orlando, who is used to the comfort of men's clothes. "The coil of skirts"[250] represents Orlando's integration into the symbolic order of femininity. It is possible to think of this journey as Orlando's process of forming her feminine sexual identity.[251]

3.4. Gender Roles in *Orlando*

Woolf's Orlando offers an exploration of gender roles by revealing how social conventions and legal structures shape them. Although Orlando's identity remains internally consistent throughout the novel, society changes treatment after the shift from male to female. Once officially recognized as a woman, Orlando is immediately subject to legal and cultural constraints previously unknown to her as a man—such as limitations on owning property and moving freely without male oversight. These experiences highlight the rigid gender expectations enforced by a patriarchal society. During the Elizabethan period, Orlando, as a man, embodies many traits associated with masculinity—i.e. status, autonomy, and authority—yet later, as a woman, she must navigate a world where such privileges are no longer available to her. Woolf uses this contrast to critique the constructed nature of gender, exposing it as a set of performative roles upheld by tradition rather than biological necessity. Through satire and historical juxtaposition, the novel reveals how systems of power sustain and legitimize gender inequalities. Woolf's critique of social gender roles reveals some

[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Brasovean, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

different points. In the paragraph below, Orlando starts to consider the advantages and disadvantages of being a woman after she changes her dress:

> "Lord," she thought, when she had recovered from her start, stretching herself out at length under her awning, "this is a pleasant, lazy way of life, to be sure. But," she thought, giving her legs a kick, "these skirts are plaguey things to have about one's heels. Yet the stuff (flowered paduasoy) is the loveliest in the world. Never have I seen my own skin (here she laid her hand on her knee) look to such advantage as now. Could I, however, leap overboard and swim in clothes like these? No! Therefore, I should have to trust to the protection of a blue-jacket. Do I object to that? Now do I?" she wondered, here encountering the first knot in the smooth skein of her argument.[252]

Woolf creates a conflict between the physical joy of femininity and its limitations through Orlando's inner monologue. "The crinoline is a Victorian symbol, and it depicts the fact that women in that period were supposed to depend on a man and to be passive since women's duty was to procreate."[253] Another example of the restrictive character of the clothes in the novel is the moment when Orlando describes the skirt she is wearing as being a "plaguey things" and that she could not take a swim dressed like that.[254] The writer demonstrates how clothes, particularly for women, can influence how a person moves through the world and are not merely a matter of personal preference. Orlando's shift from pants to skirts emphasizes how fashion may impose reliance and limit freedom by bringing up a fresh awareness of vulnerability and limitation. Through Orlando's experience, Woolf criticizes how patriarchal expectations in society educate women to be powerless by limiting their access to even the most basic liberties - such as movement, swimming, or self-defense - to what they wear.

Furthermore, Woolf continues her criticism with a mockery voice:

> And I shall never be able to crack a man over the head, or tell him he lies in his teeth, or draw my sword and run him through the body, or sit among my peers, or

[252] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., pp. 154-155.
[253] Brasovean, *op. cit*., p. 22.
[254] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

> wear a coronet, or walk in procession, or sentence a man to death, or lead an army, or prance down Whitehall on a charger, or wear seventy-two different medals on my breast. All I can do, once I set foot on English soil, is to pour out tea and ask my lords how they like it. D'you take sugar? D'you take cream?' And mincing out the words, she was horrified to perceive how low an opinion she was forming of the other sex, the manly, to which it had once been her pride to belong. "To fall from a mast-head," she thought, "because you see a woman's ankles; to dress up like a Guy Fawkes and parade the streets, so that women may praise you; to deny a woman teaching lest she may laugh at you; to be the slave of the frailest chit in petticoats. and yet to go about as if you were the Lords of creation.—Heavens!" she thought, "what fools they make of us—what fools we are!" And here it would seem from some ambiguity in her terms that she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither; and indeed, for the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each.[255]

In this paragraph, Woolf criticizes the gender roles imposed by society and the inequalities faced by women by providing a contrast. While women are supposed to do petty domesticity such as pouring tea, men's roles are more masculine and militaristic, and involve violent fantasies such as "crack a man over the head," "sentence a man to death," and "lead an army." In the passage, Woolf challenges the social expectations and norms that govern the roles of the sexes. By questioning it, she encourages her readers to evaluate their conceptions of gender and identity.

Additionally, Orlando begins to feel the pressure of not being a married woman living in the Victorian period. In that era, marriage was highly valued, as women had substantial domestic responsibilities and were expected to manage the household. Woolf's narrator is also affected by the age conditions. After a while, she encounters Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, and they decide to marry in a short time. The feeling of pressure on marriage shows Woolf's critique of Victorian age conventions. Moreover, Orlando and Shelmerdine's relationship differs from the conventional one:

[255] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., pp.157-158.

> ‘Are you positive you aren’t a man?’ he would ask anxiously, and she would echo, ‘Can it be possible you’re not a woman?’ and then they must put it to the proof without more ado. For each was so surprised at the quickness of the other's sympathy, and it was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman, that they had to put the matter to the proof at once.[256]

In the passage, both characters challenge rigid gender roles. That is why there is questioning of their sexes. It dawns on Orlando that women possess aspects of men, and men have some aspects of women. Woolf believes that people possess both masculine and feminine aspects within themselves. She illustrates the core of humanity via Orlando, who is androgynous and has a fluid gender, highlighting its flexible characteristics:

> Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above.[257]

Woolf’s depiction of Orlando’s and her husband’s relationship shows that Woolf undermines the conventional notion of heterosexual relationships and interchanges gender roles by utilizing performances of acts and attitudes typical of one gender in defining the other one.[258]

Language use is another area where gender is restricted. The limitation of language for women is observed: “We had a word for them. Ah! I have it. […]” (But we must omit that word; it was disrespectful in the extreme and passing strange on a lady’s lips).”[259] By employing the phrase “strange on a lady’s lips,” the narrator demonstrates how society assigns gender to words. It limits women’s usage of words. This argument can be correlated to Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, where Woolf critiques the lack of women’s words. For this reason,

[256] Ibid., p. 258.
[257] Ibid., p.189.
[258] Butler, *op. cit.*, pp.19-20.
[259] Woolf, *Orlando*, cit., p.156.

when the word "I"[260] is written, it immediately connotes a masculine self. Also, in *Orlando*, the narrator categorizes the word according to gender and finds it unladylike. It is acknowledged that both works highlight the limitations women face in terms of writing or speaking.

In conclusion, Woolf criticizes strict binary conceptions of gender. By doing so, she exposes the social and cultural constructs that underpin traditional gender roles in *Orlando*. She makes a distinction between gender and sex. She advocates that while sex is biological, gender is conventional. This approach aligns with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which posits that socially constructed performance is formed through repeated acts within a cultural context. With a protagonist who transcends the restrictions of conventional male and female identities, she eliminates the fixed gender associations linked to biological sex. Orlando transforms from male to female while maintaining a consistent identity, which is an example of gender fluidity in the novel. She demonstrates gender performativity and gender flexibility through Orlando's sex or gender shift and androgyny. The characters' clothing plays a crucial role in giving androgyny and gender fluidity. It serves to hide or reveal the sex or gender. People experience the social norms of the sexes about it. Through Orlando's experiences, Woolf provides readers with insights into society and challenges traditional narratives that shape identity, gender, and authority.

[260] Woolf, *A Room One's Own*, cit., p. 150.

Conclusion

This thesis explored Virginia Woolf's interaction with the themes of gender, gender identity, social conventions, and limitations on women through a close reading of three of her works: *Mrs. Dalloway, A Room of One's Own*, and *Orlando*. She critiques the underlying beliefs of societal norms and women's roles in society through her writing. This study examines how Woolf's literary voice both reflected and challenged the social standards of her period by analysing her depiction of women's experiences and lives, as well as the impact of patriarchal customs on them.

The three works analysed in this thesis have complex and changing perspectives on gender. Woolf treats gender as an ongoing process affected by society, culture, and language. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf explores the consequences of maintaining social norms and established gender roles in marriage, as exemplified by Clarissa. She explores emotional and sexual suppression- particularly via tenderness between Clarissa and Sally Seton. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf critiques the inequalities faced by women, particularly in the fields of education, literature, and private space, while extending her assertion of financial independence, a private room, and intellectual freedom. Woolf stretches the limits of gender depiction by creating a protagonist who lives across eras and changes sex halfway through the book. This biography questions the cultural and temporal stability of identity itself, in addition to challenging the strict binary concept of gender by offering androgyny and fluid gender.

Contrary to attempting to categorize Woolf as a radical feminist or placing her within a particular tradition of feminist thinking, this research focuses on how she approaches gender and social conventions. Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny Woolf's contribution to early feminist and gender discussion. She foreshadows some of the later developments in feminist theory, including those developed by Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and others. She rejects the limitations placed on women's lives and literature. Thus, her writing corresponds with the current gender and feminist debate.

According to the study's findings, Woolf's works underscore her approach to gender issues, her understanding of gender beyond the traditional binary of sexes, and her contributions to feminist thought by challenging conventional gender roles. She challenges social conventions. Additionally, she advocates women's intellectual and creative freedom.

Moreover, through her writings, she encourages readers to think critically and imagine unconventional methods for understanding gender.

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