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WRITING, GENDER AND ANDROGYNY IN VIRGINIA
WOOLF'S *ORLANDO*: A *BIOGRAPHY*

Porto Alegre

2017/2

**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS**

**WRITING, GENDER AND ANDROGYNY IN VIRGINIA
WOOLF'S *ORLANDO*: A *BIOGRAPHY***

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso
apresentado ao Instituto de Letras da
UFRGS, como requisito parcial para
obtenção do grau de Licenciada em Letras
pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande
do Sul.

**Porto Alegre,
Janeiro de 2018**

FICHA ATALOGRÁFICA

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Porto Alegre: UFRGS, Instituto de Letras, 2018. 44 p.

Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso (Licenciatura em Letras – Instituto de Letras)
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

Literatura inglesa; Crítica literária; Escrita feminina; Estudos de gênero.

“I am not one and simple, but complex and many.”

Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

AGRADECIMENTOS

Um grande e eterno obrigada por todas as pessoas que acreditaram em mim, me motivaram e compartilharam comigo momentos de riso, alegria ou sabedoria. Me sinto grata por toda oportunidade de aprender que é derramada no meu caminho. Agradeço a Deus, acima de tudo, pela existência. E mais estritamente por todas as condições favoráveis para que eu estudasse, aprendesse e me desenvolvesse. Se eu não tivesse o suporte da minha família, eu não teria prestado vestibular, muito menos me mantido na universidade. Agradeço profundamente à minha avó Margarida, não apenas por todo cuidado e carinho que ela tem comigo, mas também por ser este exemplo de força e honestidade. Vovó criou cinco mulheres independentes e dois homens trabalhadores. Denize, Daniela, Deize, Dalva, Daiane, Dimas e Dilamar: vocês são meu orgulho. Minha mãe é a minha inspiração para ser uma pessoa mais doce e empática. O mundo, com certeza, carece de pessoas assim. Tia Denize, obrigada por sempre mover montanhas pelo meu bem-estar. Dinda, obrigada por ser minha parceira de aventuras e também por todos os conselhos. Meus primos(as) são tesourinhos(as) na minha vida. Kamila, Carol, Gabi, as duas Eduardas, Thafiny, Matheus, Arthur, Maria e Lorenzo: sou grata por todos os momentos que passamos juntos. Amo muito todos vocês.

Nos últimos anos ganhei uma irmã, Isabelle, e um irmão, Benício Josino. Obrigada, Deus, por poder experienciar o amor fraterno. Não posso deixar de agradecer a todos os amigos que eu fiz. Carol, você me ensinou o que é amizade, 2018 é nosso. Meus amigos da época do colégio: Juana, Thais, Maiara, Thiago e Gabriel: me deixa feliz ver o quanto evoluímos e crescemos juntos (mesmo que às vezes distantes). Juana, obrigada por ser essa parceira de todas as horas e fazer o rolê valer! Gabriel, obrigada por todas as discussões sobre educação, todas as Faceds e todos as viagens de Tm3. Meus anjinhos durante toda a graduação: Joice, Felipe e Sara, obrigada por toda a parceria, todos os abraços e os momentos que dividimos juntos. O curso não teria a mesma leveza sem a companhia de vocês. Agradeço também à minha amiga Gabi, colega BIC, gêmea de signo, amiga nos momentos bons e ruins. Fico muito feliz de ter podido dividir contigo, Gabi, as alegrias e angústias da formatura.

Durante minha caminhada conheci muitas pessoas que me inspiraram, agradeço a todas elas também. Me sinto sortuda por ter tido professores incríveis, agradeço a todos(as) eles(as) por fazerem a diferença no mundo. Cabe aqui ressaltar alguns nomes que foram muito importantes para mim durante a graduação. Às três professoras, eu gostaria de agradecer por fazer da sala de aula um espaço convidativo à participação do aluno. Profa. Dra. Cinara Pavani, com certeza, foi nas tuas aulas que eu dei meus primeiros passos em direção à literatura, obrigada. Profa. Dra. Denise Sales, obrigada por me incentivar nos estudos de Literatura Russa, por todos os cursos de extensão e pelas parcerias. Gosto muito de trabalhar contigo! Profa. Dra. Sandra Maggio, minha orientadora em bolsas de monitorias, Iniciação Científica e Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso, obrigada por ter apostado em mim. Te admiro pelo ser humano inigualável que tu és. Obrigada por todo o suporte e motivação durante esses anos de pesquisa. Encontrar pessoas como tu no meu caminho me fazem ter vontade de seguir. Finalmente, agradeço também à banca, Profa. Me. Monica Costa e Prof. Dr. Valter Fritsch, por terem aceitado o convite tão docemente.

Por fim, agradeço ainda ao Governo Federal pelas bolsas de Iniciação Científica PROGRAD e CNPq com as quais pude contar durante minha formação universitária.

Obrigada!

RESUMO

Esta monografia tem por objetivo analisar escrita, gênero e androginia através da personagem *Orlando*, criada por Virginia Woolf em seu romance homônimo *Orlando: uma biografia* (1928). Esses três aspectos são predominantemente examinados através de ideias propostas por Judith Butler em *Gender Trouble* (1990), Sandra Bem nos ensaios “Sex Typing and Androgyny: Further Explorations of the Expressive Domain” (1976) e “Sex Role Adaptability: The Consequence of Psychological Androgyny” (1975) e Virginia Woolf em *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). Orlando é apresentado, desde o início da obra, como um ser criativo e singular, que possui grande aptidão para a escrita. Também é descrito como sendo uma pessoa capaz de ajustar seu comportamento a fim de se adaptar ao que é esperado dele em diferentes situações. Além disso, Orlando passa por uma mudança de sexo no meio da história. Aceitando esse acontecimento fantástico sem maiores questionamentos, a presente pesquisa investiga o impacto dessa transformação na vida de Orlando. Mais especificamente, a questão a ser decifrada aqui é de que maneiras gênero e androginia influenciariam o desempenho e o desenvolvimento da carreira de Orlando como escritor(a).

Palavras-chave: Literatura inglesa; Crítica literária; Escrita feminina; Estudos de gênero

ABSTRACT

This monograph aims to analyze writing, gender and androgyny in Virginia Woolf's character Orlando in her homonymous novel *Orlando: A Biography* (1928). These three aspects are mainly examined through ideas presented by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), Sandra Bem in the essays "Sex Typing and Androgyny: Further Explorations of the Expressive Domain" and "Sex Role Adaptability: The Consequence of Psychological Androgyny" and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Since the beginning of the novel, Orlando is presented as a very talented, unique creature, with a great aptitude to writing. Also, Orlando is depicted as an adaptable person, who shifts his behavior according to what is expected from him in different situations. Besides, Orlando goes through a sex change in the middle of the story. Accepting the fantastic happenings of the narrative as real, this work investigates which impact this transformation has in Orlando's life. More specifically, this research intends to answer how gender and androgyny might influence in Orlando's performance and career as a writer.

Key words: English Literature, Literary Criticism, Women's writing, Gender studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Being five years in an undergraduate course provided me with the opportunity of raising many questions and reflecting about a variety of issues. I have questioned my education, what I was taught before and what was known by me as truth. At University I met numerous different people and listened to their speeches and experiences, which were dissimilar to mine. I started to see the world through new lenses, that made me aware of others, and other realities, thus enabling me to ask more new questions. Many “whys”, “whens” and “hows” echoed in my head through these years. As, from childhood, I have always been fascinated with learning new things, I felt the urge to go after new answers. This is how I found myself locked in my room reading and rereading Virginia Woolf’s essays in order to find out what happens when women write, and how that occurs.

In the last two years I have been studying the impact that writing may have in one’s life. It all started when I read literary works written by women who reflect about the process of writing and realize that their experiences are often different from men’s. Literature written by women exposes events that happen in women’s lives that men are not usually aware of, and vice-versa. I went further in the research. When I read Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), a greater amount of questions popped in my mind. Most of them have more than one possibility of an answer. Others seem unanswerable. But there is one I decided to investigate in my monograph: How is androgyny to contribute in one’s development as a writer?

In order to pursue that goal, I am determined to analyze Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando: A Biography*. First published in 1928, the work presents the life of Orlando, a unique being, who has great aptitude for writing. Mixing two genres – fictional narrative and biography – the narrator/biographer tells what happens in Orlando’s fantastically long existence, which starts in the mid-sixteenth century and extends until 1928, that stands for “the present time”, because that is the year when the book was published. Having lived about four hundred years, the eponymous character lives through a series of events, the most remarkable being a sex change. There are different possible ways to read this sex change. It can be taken as a metaphor for the natural talent of writing, which can befall a man or a woman. Or it can be understood as a fantastic event. For the sake of this monograph, my position is to accept the facts at face value, as a natural matter of fact, as

they are presented by the narrator/ biographer. The reason why I will not open the research into the study of *Orlando* as a fantastic fantasy is that I do not want to lose track of my purpose, which is the analysis of the development of the protagonist as an author. The change of sex, when Orlando turns from a man into a woman, is relevant to this monograph insofar as it alters his/her conditions of production as a writer.

Orlando: A Biography (1928) was dedicated by Virginia Woolf to her close friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West. In a letter from October 22nd, 1927 Woolf (1982) mentions that *Orlando: A Biography* was supposed to be a small book, in which she thought she could “combine it with fiction, but once the mind gets hot, it can’t stop.” (WOOLF, 1982, p.161) Through reading Woolf’s diary, one can realize that the author believed in the fluidity of writing. In other words, letting the words flow naturally. Woolf also wrote that “this one came in a rush” and she “had very little idea what the story was to be about.” (WOOLF, 1982, p.161) Indeed, it seems she had some kind of urge to write this novel. “I am writing Orlando half in a mock style very clear & plain, so that people will understand every word. But the balance between truth & fantasy must be careful. It is based on Vita, Violet Trefusis, Lord Lascelles, Knole &c” (1982, p.162) Vita Sackville-West, who was also a writer, was Woolf’s lover, being frequently mentioned in her letters (1982). Both Trefusis and Lascelles had been Sackville-West’s affairs in the past and served as inspiration for Woolf to create characters and situations in *Orlando: A Biography*. According to Elkins’ (2010), for instance, Sackville-West is compared to Orlando in their similarities of behavior and resemblance in their physical traits. Thus, it is also interesting to examine in which extent the book character is inspired in Woolf’s friend and what possible meanings this attributes to the story.

A brief survey of the critical fortune of *Orlando* shows that the novel has been analysed in several different lines. German and Kaehele (1962), examine how the social and historical background of the novel change as the time flows, and the consequences that follow in Orlando’s life as a person and as a writer. Burns (1994) reads *Orlando* as a farce, a parody that criticizes social habits and practices. Burns sees Orlando’s essence is unchanged, but examines the ways in which he/she accommodates to the different fashions and modes through the centuries that pass.

Among so many interesting and different approaches to this book, the aim of the present research is to investigate *Orlando: A Biography* in respect to its contribution to the

study of writers and writing. As Orlando is privileged to experience both a masculine and a feminine perception of things, this monograph can inquire how these different involvements may contribute to his/her construction as an author. Moreover, it explores Woolf's ideas about the writing issue. What does one need to become a writer? Is there any feature that contributes for one to create a work of art? Do men and women face the same difficulties concerning writing? Where is Orlando (as a character) placed in this discussion? In Orlando's perception as a writer, what things change and what things remain the same as he shifts from manhood into womanhood? And finally, how does Orlando benefit from this androgynous condition?

Not seeing gender as something fixed and binary allows us to attest in what ways Orlando as a character benefits from this condition in his/her development as a writer. In order to verify that, this monograph is structured in three main parts. As the three chapters are interconnected, the addressed topics will not only appear in their assigned sections. Thus, chapter 2, which discusses gender will also bring to light some aspects of androgyny that will be dealt with on chapter 3 and vice versa. On Chapter one "On Writing" I revisit Woolf's reflections toward the act of writing. Analyzing ideas presented in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and "Professions for women" (2015), I discuss favorable conditions for one to write fiction. But who are the individuals more likely to have or achieve these conditions? And which are the barriers a woman, for example, may find until she reaches such circumstances? Moreover, I also analyze Orlando's relation to writing. Chapter two explores the definitions of gender and its implications. In order to conceptualize gender, I use Butler's contributions (1990). Also in this chapter, I analyze how concepts presented by Butler can help one to understand the character Orlando in terms of gender and sexuality. Orlando's lovers are examined through the same perspective. Chapter three discusses the boom of gender studies and androgyny. Focalizing especially in some researches done by Sandra Bem (1975 and 1976), this chapter explores Bem's findings and compares them to Woolf's (1929) and Butler's (1990) theories. Besides that, this chapter highlights how androgyny appears in Orlando and how it may affect the construction of one's self. It is also important to point out that this research understands masculine and feminine as related to female and male experiences. By using the word masculine, this research is referring to experiences that are common for men. The same happens with the use of the word feminine. Finally, this monograph intends to show how *Orlando: A Biography* represents the human struggles about one's selves and the attempt to create a work of art.

1. ON WRITING

1.1 *A Room of One's Own*

This work is an extended essay, developed from a series of lectures given by Woolf at Newham College and Girton College in October 1928. First published in 1929, *A Room of One's Own* presents an overview of literature written by women since ancient times until the nineteenth century. Through researches done in the British Museum, Woolf realized that there were not many recordings of works written by women before the Elizabethan period. In order to understand why so few women have published their works, if compared to men, at that time, Woolf analyzed the conditions women were given to write. Woolf observed that the few women who somehow managed to publish their works had money and a room of their own, that is, a place from which to write and produce literature. Therefore, Woolf asserted that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (WOOLF, 2004 p.4). This extract has caught the attention of many scholars and has been widely discussed among them. In the essay “In Search of Our Mothers Gardens”, Alice Walker questions Woolf’s ideas by presenting the case of Phillis Wheatley, a poet who had been a slave, who lived in the eighteenth century and had some of her works published. “What then are we to make of Phillis Wheatley, a slave, who owned not even herself?” (WALKER, 1994 p.404). Wheatley is not mentioned in *A Room of One's Own*, neither are other black women. It is relevant to consider the possible reasons why Wheatley’s and others’ existences and literary histories were not registered in the books of the British Museum used by Woolf in her research. Perhaps as a consequence of that time and cultural code, the fact is that there is a lack of questioning towards class and race in *A Room of One's Own*. In spite that, Woolf’s essay is acknowledged as a classic in Feminist studies.

The text is seen as an important landmark in claiming women’s right to write and to be recognized as intellectual beings. Many topics have been explored in *A Room of One's own*, such as women’s writing, the politics of space, or the exclusion of working women. Moreover, Woolf’s text has also inspired scholars to continue this investigation about the space occupied by women as writers of literature. Many critical and literary works on the topic were written after *A Room of One's Own*. Some of them even elicit the name of the essay in their titles. Productions as Sandra Cisneros’s novel *The House on Mango Street*

(1984) and her autobiography *A House of My Own* (2015) are some examples. Almost ninety years since its first publication, the essay is still discussed worldwide.

One interesting point raised in *A Room of One's Own* is Woolf's considerations about the concept of androgyny. Thinking of which would be the best state of mind to create a literary work, Woolf reflects about Coleridge's statement that "a great mind must be androgynous." (COLERIDGE, 2005, online). She then develops the idea that "it is when this fusion (between masculine and feminine) takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties." (WOOLF, 2004, p.113-114). She then asserts that "perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine" (WOOLF, 2004, p. 114). When Woolf mentions creation, she is reflecting upon the creation of masterpieces. She is unveiling the nature behind great works of literature, the classical ones, the ones whose words are not strongly attached to a period of time. Thus, these literary productions are still read and capable to cause an impact in their readers. She refers to authors as William Shakespeare or Marcel Proust.

In the excerpt below, Woolf explains how the process occurs:

Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated. The whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fullness. There must be freedom and there must be peace. (WOOLF, 2004, p. 121)

Hence, in Woolf's words, the best mental state to create a masterpiece would be androgynous. Woolf's concept of androgyny is not genderless. It is not single-sexed. Androgyny, to Woolf, is achieved when both masculine and feminine elements are equally balanced. This may be a challenge for the writer, and perhaps even more challenging for women. In *A Room Of One's Own*, Woolf points out how differences between men's and women's experiences might affect the literature they produce. Besides having more access to privileges such as money, intellectual freedom and a space of their own, men were also allowed to go out of the house and travel much more frequently than women. Woolf contrasts the cases of Charlotte Brontë and Leo Tolstoy, two acknowledged writers of the nineteenth century. Besides the fact that Charlotte Brontë was born twelve years before Liev Tolstoy and they did not share the same nationality, there is a more outstanding trait

that differentiates both authors. While Brontë did not possess “three hundred a year” and more “knowledge of the busy world, and towns and regions full of life” (WOOLF, 2004, p.81), Tolstoy was “going to the wars; picking up unhindered and uncensored all that varied experience of human life which served him so splendidly later when he came to write his books.” (WOOLF, 2004, p.82). Woolf’s point, in this comparison, is that men were allowed a wider range of outdoor experience than women. Consequently, their thematic range was wider and enabled them to write about a greater variety of things. While women were restricted to write about domestic household, men could more easily explore new lands, travel, meet new people and have contact with other cultures. If compared to other women writers Charlotte Brontë still had privileged experiences, such as living two years abroad in Belgium. This would make her an exception to what was usual. The protagonist of her most famous novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) also had outdoor experiences when traveling. On the other hand these experiences do not seem to be enough neither for Brontë or Eyre. In fact, this issue appears in *Jane Eyre*. In the following passage, which was also discussed by Woolf in *A Room Of One’s Own*, one can notice how this lack of experiences affected women:

then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character than was here within my reach. I valued what was good in Mrs Fairfax, and what was good in Adele; but I believed in the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness, and what I believed in I wished to behold. (BRONTË, 2012, p. 104)

In this passage, the urge to cross the boundaries of what has been imposed to the feminine sex is genuinely expressed. As the narrative continues, this issue goes even deeper. Jane Eyre, the first-person narrator, puts in question the different conditions men and women possessed at that time. She vindicates equality for both sexes, especially in terms of freedom and education. In reality, this issue clearly stands out simply as a matter of gender:

Who blames me? Many, no doubt, and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes [...] It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions

are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (BRONTË, 2012, p. 104)

At the same time Woolf praises Charlotte Brontë for this discussion raised in *Jane Eyre*, she points out a problem in its narrative. After the paragraph above, Brontë unexpectedly changes the topic by talking about Grace Poole's laugh. To Woolf, "That is an awkward break, [...] It is upsetting to come upon Grace Poole all of a sudden. The continuity is disturbed." (WOOLF, 2004, p. 80) Moreover, Woolf thinks that "if one reads them (those pages in *Jane Eyre*) over and marks that jerk in them, that indignation, one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire." (WOOLF, 2004, p.81) What does Woolf mean by that? Being too attached to one's sex might block someone to achieve the androgynous state of the mind, in other terms, to achieve genius. One must detach him/herself to his/her bodily existence and think with his/her mind only, in order to create a genuine work of art. As Woolf alerts "She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely. She will write of herself where she should write of her characters." (WOOLF, 2004, p.81). This tranquility, this peaceful state of mind would be, in general, harder for women to achieve than men. This is because of all struggle women have been through in order to write. Thus, it is possible to assert that *Jane Eyre* is a work that bends itself to the feminine. This way, the literary work would affect more female readers than male readers.

1.2 Professions for Women

In the essay "Professions for women" (1931), Woolf highlights some obstacles for women writers. One of them is to kill the Angel in the House, an image recurrent in Victorian times, related to the role of women and derived from the poem "The Angel in the House" (1854), written by Coventry Patmore in praise of his wife, Emily. (PATMORE,

2014, ONLINE) Woolf sees this image as a phantom that would mentally chase women: “It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her.” (WOOLF, 1931, ONLINE). The Angel in the House would be a woman who fits what is socially expected from her. She should become the imposed model for others to follow, as she is “intensely sympathetic”, “charming”, “utterly unselfish” and excellent “in the difficult arts of family life”, after all “she sacrificed herself daily.” (WOOLF, 1931, ONLINE). Since the Angel in the House haunts women, Woolf exposes how their freedom in writing may be conditioned to this. Woolf claims that women should break themselves free from this model first by ignoring the Angel in the House, then killing it.

The phantom of the Angel in the House provokes a state of constant surveillance and self-consciousness in women that is not likely to exist in men’s minds. In this respect, men could move and express themselves more spontaneously, without having to verify, at each step, if what they say or do is in accordance with the standards proposed. Accordingly, the judgment of women’s and men’s writings has been quite different through time, men being endowed with more freedom in life and in writing. In short, male writers could move with less restraint and could count on a wider range of themes to explore.

Woolf argues that “To speak without figure she (the woman writer) had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say.” (WOOLF, 1931). Women were constantly frightened of what men and society would think of them. Thus, “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. [...]. Her imagination could work no longer.” (WOOLF, 1931). This is one barrier women always had to face in order to produce literature. Besides, Woolf believes that this experience is common among women writers, for “they are impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex.” This happens because even though men “allow themselves great freedom” in writing and expressing their opinions, they still “condemn such freedom in women” (WOOLF, 1931).

Notwithstanding that, there are great obstacles for women to free themselves in writing. Beyond having to deal with lack of money and the lack of a room of one’s own, women would also have to fight against the haunting of the Angel in the House and the status women writers have received through the years. Even though recently the status of

women writers has been changing, it is important to remember that for many centuries things moved slowly. There was almost no sign of improvements for many centuries, which may justify why George Eliot, Charlotte, Anne and Emily Brontë and many other women writers chose to write under a male pseudonym. This fact alone shows how different things were for men and women. After all, what women were expected to do was to get married, to do the housework and to bear children. Besides the lack of money, and of the room of one's own, those roles were other recurrent obstacles for women who wrote. Doing the house chores, or taking care of children were all in charge of women, therefore men could have more time available to sit by themselves in a room of their own and freely produce literature without further distractions. Also, men were less worried about what would be unsuitable to write or say. As a consequence, men were closer than women to intellectual freedom.

The concept of intellectual freedom, presented by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, is defined as the condition “of which great writings are born.” (QUILLER-COUCH, 2006, ONLINE). As Woolf points out, “Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. And women have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time.” (WOOLF, 2004, p.125). Being writing conditions more favourable for men than for women at that time, it is possible to assert that it was easier for men to create a literary masterpiece than for women. Female writers, as for instance the Brontë sisters, had to stop their writing to do the house chores, to peel the potatoes. Others, like Jane Austen, had to hide their writings when there were visitors in the house, because writing was not an activity appropriate for a lady (WOOLF, 2012). This is why, in general, men have been more privileged than women as authors.

1.3 Orlando as a Writer

Orlando, born in an English noble family, shows great aptitude for writing since the beginning of the novel. Soon after he is presented in his biography, we have a scene in which he develops his writing skills:

But to continue — Orlando slowly drew in his head, sat down at the table, and, with the half-conscious air of one doing what they do every day of their lives at this hour, took out a writing book labelled ‘Aethelbert: A

Tragedy in Five Acts,' and dipped an old stained goose quill in the ink. (WOOLF, 2014, p.3)

The biographer reveals Orlando's disposition to write. Being a man in this first writing scene, Orlando does not face any obstacles to produce literature. Indeed, his writing seems to flow easily. As the biographer shows, "soon he had covered ten pages and more with poetry." (WOOLF, 2014, p.3). On the other hand, even though Orlando "was fluent, [...] he was abstract." (Idem, p.3), it is relevant to mention that, at the time, Orlando was sixteen years old. Thus, it is natural that his writing presented some flaws to be improved as the time went by. Not only his age accounts for his writing, but also his sex and social class. In the extract below, the biographer mentions which were the topics Orlando discussed in his works:

Vice, Crime, Misery were the personages of his drama; there were Kings and Queens of impossible territories; horrid plots confounded them; noble sentiments suffused them; there was never a word said as he himself would have said it, but all was turned with a fluency and sweetness which, considering his age — he was not yet seventeen — and that the sixteenth century had still some years of its course to run, were remarkable enough. (WOOLF, 2014, p.3)

Orlando, as a young man living in the sixteenth century, wrote about "Vice, Crime, Misery", "Kings and Queens", "impossible territories" and "horrid plots". These topics, at the time, were recurrent in literature written by men. According to Woolf, each of the sexes will write about its own experience. (WOOLF, 2012) Then, considering that the sexes undergo different experiences, it is natural that they would write about distinct issues. While men described their adventures in distant lands, women wrote about life inside home. Literature written by women was strongly influenced by the living room atmosphere and literature written by men was inspired in social and political conflicts. As the timespan of the novel ranges from the sixteenth into the nineteenth century, we can say that Orlando's first writings were more inclined to the masculine topics.

Orlando's aptitude for writing is not presented as intrinsic to his sex or social condition, but rather as a gift, endowed by birth. For "his unfitness for the life of society, [...] all the turbulence of his youth, [...] and his love of the country proved that he himself belonged to the sacred race rather than to the noble — was by birth a writer, rather than an

aristocrat.” (WOOLF, 2014, p. 49-50). Destined to be a writer, Orlando develops his skills throughout the novel. He works in the writing of a poem named “The Oak Tree” during the whole novel, which covers a period of about 400 years.

During his lifetime as a man, Orlando goes through periods when he intensely works in his poems. There are periods, also, when he feels demotivated or distracted by other events and consequently produces fewer poems. One of these events occurs right after Orlando visits the (fictional) famous writer Nick Greene to ask for advice and feedback about his writing. Orlando feels subdued and a little shy in front of the writer and does not show his poems to him. In the end, Greene writes a satirical poem, in which the caricature is recognized as Orlando. The poem is widely spread among Orlando’s acquaintances and Orlando decides to burn all his poems, except “The Oak Tree”. After some centuries of adventures, that include sex change, Orlando, now a woman, refinds the poem in the bosom of her t-shirt:

She had carried this about with her for so many years now, and in such hazardous circumstances, that many of the pages were stained, some were torn, while the straits she had been in for writing paper when with the gipsies, had forced her to overscore the margins and cross the lines till the manuscript looked like a piece of darning most conscientiously carried out. She turned back to the first page and read the date, 1586, written in her own boyish hand. She had been working at it for close three hundred years now. It was time to make an end. (WOOLF, 2014 p.157)

As Orlando rereads the poem, she thinks of herself and realizes “how very little she had changed all these years.” (WOOLF, 2014 p.158) Then she reflects about the duality of her existence and how that granted her a great amount of experience. That duality allowed her to evolve and to rebuild herself. “She had been a gloomy boy, in love with death, as boys are; and then she had been amorous and florid; and then she had been sprightly and satirical; and sometimes she had tried prose and sometimes she had tried drama.” (WOOLF, 2014 p.158). Regardless of being adaptable and having a shifting self, Orlando’s essence remains the same. By constructing this fantastic character, Woolf exposes the richness of his/her detachment. When Orlando accepts the different situations life lays upon him/her, the process of learning to get detached from his/her bodily conditions is triggered. Being more mind than body, Orlando is finally capable of completely using his faculties, achieving literary success with his/her masterpiece, “The Oak Tree”.

As a woman, Orlando, has to meet challenges that were inexistent while she lived as a man. One of them was the presence of men in the room she was writing. “She tried to go on with what she was saying; no words came. [...] But as for writing poetry with Basket and Bartholomew in the room, it was impossible.” (WOOLF, 2014, p. 158). Even so, Orlando insists and strives to improve her poem even further:

I am myself but a vile link
 Amid life's weary chain,
 But I have spoken hallow'd words,
 Oh, do not say in vain!
 Will the young maiden, when her tears,
 Alone in moonlight shine,
 Tears for the absent and the loved,
 Murmur —
 [...]
 She was so changed, the soft carnation cloud
 Once mantling o'er her cheek like that which eve
 Hangs o'er the sky, glowing with roseate hue,
 Had faded into paleness, broken by
 Bright burning blushes, torches of the tomb,
 (WOOLF, 2014, p. 159)

At this point Orlando's writing pauses, because she accidentally spills ink in the page. The spilling makes Orlando feel frightened, perhaps haunted by the phantom of the Angel in the House, “She was all of a quiver, all of a stew. Nothing more repulsive could be imagined than to feel the ink flowing thus in cascades of involuntary inspiration. What had happened to her? Was it the damp, was it Bartholomew, was it Basket, what was it? But the room was empty.” (WOOLF, 2014, p.159). This episode goes by and Orlando continues reflecting upon life. Living as a married woman, she asks herself whether it is appropriate for a woman in her situation to write.

And finally, if one still wished, more than anything in the whole world, to write poetry, was it marriage? She had her doubts. But she would put it to the test. She looked at the ring. She looked at the ink pot. Did she dare? No, she did not. But she must. No, she could not. What should she do then? Faint, if possible. But she had never felt better in her life. ‘Hang it all!’ she cried, with a touch of her old spirit. ‘Here goes!’ And she plunged her pen neck deep in the ink. To her enormous surprise, there was no explosion. She drew the nib out. It was wet, but not dripping. She

wrote. The words were a little long in coming, but come they did. Ah! but did they make sense? she wondered, a panic coming over her lest the pen might have been at some of its involuntary pranks again. She read,

*And then I came to a field where the springing grass
Was dulled by the hanging cups of fritillaries,
Sullen and foreign-looking, the snaky flower,
Scarfed in dull purple, like Egyptian girls:—* (WOOLF, 2014 p. 178)

In the passage above, Orlando experiments something she has never been through before. She would never hesitate before writing during her experience as a man. Now, as a woman, she thinks at least twice before grabbing the pen. Here is one more episode in Woolf's novel that illustrates how haunted women writers have been by the Angel in the House. Thanks to her daring, Orlando recovers her confidence to write and innovate "As she wrote, she felt some power [...] reading over her shoulder, and when she had written 'Egyptian girls', the power told her to stop. Grass, the power seemed to say, [...] girls? Are girls necessary?" (WOOLF, 2014, p. 178). On the other hand, Orlando still wonders about the appropriateness of the images she is creating in the poem. By evoking Egyptian girls, she is recalling powerful feminine figures as Cleopatra, for instance. Is it suitable for a married woman to write about that? She asks herself, but then her mind engages in different questions. Concerning time, Orlando understands that there is a "spirit of the age" which is important to have a transaction "of infinite delicacy" with the writer, because "the whole fortune of his works" depends on the two. (2014, p. 179) Finally, "she was in an extremely happy position; she need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself. Now, therefore, she could write, and write she did. She wrote. She wrote. She wrote." (2014, p.179) Hence, even having some struggle to free her mind from the impositions laid upon her sex, Orlando is able to find a balance between her masculine and feminine forces, and this provides her with (1) more experiences to write about, and (2) a more favorable condition to create a work of art.

Even though Orlando is presented as someone destined to become a writer since the beginning of the novel, its depiction continues after her sex change "And if we look for a moment at Orlando writing at her table, we must admit that never was there a woman more fitted for that calling." (WOOLF, 2014 p.181). Although Orlando has many favourable qualities and experiences life both as man and as a woman, which contribute for construction her as a writer, after being married she is only able to write in the absence of

her husband. It is when Shelmerdine, her husband, travels on work that she finally finds herself in favourable conditions to write. In the presence of Shelmerdine, Orlando seems to think more about love than of her passion for writing, since she spends years without practicing her gift. Thus, one can observe that Orlando, as a man, feels comfortable to write at any place, at any time, alone or among people, except when he is mocked about his writing. The same does not happen when Orlando is a woman, for she needs solitude and fears being censured.

The three works by Woolf referred to in this section illustrate the importance of counting on economic independence and a space of one's own for people who aim to develop their writing skills. They also show how things can be different for men and women, and this is illustrated by the changes we see in Orlando's writing process. The next step of this study is to discuss gender and its implications. Chapter Two explores gender definitions, transcending the already established concepts of masculine and feminine, showing how gender might influence one's creative process. This discussion serves to emphasize the ways in which Orlando, as a character, illustrates unconventional gender definitions.

2. ON GENDER

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are favorable conditions which help one to produce fiction. Those depend upon social class, race and gender. This chapter aims to discuss this third aspect: gender. The first section debates the concept of gender and its implications. Second section explores how gender is illustrated in Orlando, as a character. Third section debates gender expressions in Orlando's lovers. The topics of these three sections sometimes intermix, for they are closely linked.

2.1 The Concept of Gender

Many people still wonder “what is gender, after all?”. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), the American philosopher Judith Butler defines gender as a “shifting and conceptual phenomenon” (p.10), that is “culturally constructed (p.6)”. But, what is gender, exactly? In the patriarchal world, there are only two genders: masculine and feminine. These genders are related to one's sex. There is man and woman. If one were born a man, his gender would be male. If one were born a woman, then, her gender would be female. In the patriarchy, the man is allowed decision power and a bunch of privileges, while women are taught to serve and obey men, since childhood. No other gender is well-accepted by the patriarchy in order to maintain the structure of its society. Imagine, if there were any other genders the whole system would be disorganized, then putting in danger the male privilege. Thus, gender is constructed in order to establish the patriarchy. Butler also alerts that “the very notion of “patriarchy” has threatened to become a universalizing concept that overrides or reduces distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts.” (BUTLER, 1990, p. 35) As there exists numerous kinds of societies, the patriarchy is expressed differently in each of them. The extent of male domination varies from society to society, many times, being related to transcultural traits. Hence, thinking of patriarchy as something that equally affects all societies would be inaccurate.

Butler (1990) exposes misconceptions towards the term “gender”. To her, gender is not binary, it is not intrinsic to sex. For instance, one can be born a man, but does not identify himself as male. Sometimes, neither will the subject identify himself as female, for gender is non-static, but dynamic. Furthermore, Butler asserts that “if sex does not limit

gender, then perhaps there are genders, ways of culturally interpreting the sexed body, that are in no way restricted by the apparent duality of sex.” (BUTLER, 1990 p.112). The philosopher alerts to the limitations towards gender that are spread in society. She criticizes the fact that social impositions attempt to delimit boundaries to gender. “If gender is not tied to sex, either causally or expressively, then gender is a kind of action that can potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex” (112). Being gender detached to sex, it can go further than the pre-established behavior. Actually, according to Butler, there is possibly a huge amount of genders, being some of them still unknown and unclassified. There is also the difficulty of explaining gender, for its nature is not fixed, rather mutable. Then, more than one gender might diverge in a person, who may shift his/her gender according to the situation he/she is living in.

Besides, Butler (1990) sees gender not as a determinant factor of one’s identity, but part of it, instead. A person is not merely his/her gender, but first of all, a human being. Thus, the human being should not be conditioned to adopt a behavior that fits the pre-established concepts of male and female, for his/her identity is not only defined by his/her sex. In the passage below, Butler exposes the complexity of the issue:

If one “is a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. (BUTLER, 1990, p.3)

In this point, Woolf’s ideas meet Butler’s. Woolf believes in the possibility of one’s mental detachment concerning his sex, and so seems Butler. Sex does not define who a person is. It does not define a person’s talents and abilities. But sex, also as gender (and other factors mentioned by Butler in the extract above, is decisive when it comes to the experiences one has in the world. It is broadly known that men, women and non-binary have different life experiences. Although this is not the only trait that will define it, many other factors interfere and intersect in the circle.

Another aspect Butler criticizes is how the socially constructed “stability of binary sex” (BUTLER, 1990 p.6) affects how gender is seen and misunderstood. The philosopher states that “even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and

constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two.” (BUTLER, 1990, p.6). Thus, the imposed binary character of sex results in the “belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex” (p.6), where genders would act as mirrors of sex, and would also be restricted by it. This is how the misconceptions of gender are widely spread. On the other side, when one thinks of gender as detached and independent of sex, gender thus 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* as easily as a female one. (p.6)” Hence, when one stops thinking of gender as automatically associated to sex, one is finally able to understand that gender is this “free-floating artifice that may assume different forms and formats. Consequently, one is capable to recognize that gender may shift and change, for it has a non-static character.

2.2 Gender in the Character Orlando

Having defined the beliefs of this research towards the concept of gender, now it is time to discuss how gender and its implications are portrayed in *Orlando: A Biography* (1928). The starting sentence of the novel discusses itself the question of Orlando’s sex: “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.” (WOOLF, 2014, p.1). Here Orlando is presented as unquestionably belonging to the male sex. This need to reassure Orlando’s sex in the first sentence of the book is, itself, something to be examined. If Orlando is surely a man, why would there be the urge of highlighting it? To affirm that Orlando, at the beginning of the narrative, is a man is fundamental for the further discussion about his/sex, because as the time goes by, Orlando frees his/herself from social conventions in terms of gender sometimes.

All through the novel, Orlando is described as an enchanting, charming being, who is able to delight everyone around him/her. Orlando seems to have some kind of magic in his/her essence, for he is “the adored of many women and some men.” (WOOLF, 2014, p.79). His/her physical appearance also seem to have some influence in that, as “a more candid, sullen face it would be impossible to find” (WOOLF, 2014, p.2) In the passage below, the biographer gives an interesting account about the effect Orlando had upon people:

It was not necessary that they should speak to him or even that they should see him; they conjured up before them especially when the scenery was romantic, or the sun was setting, the figure of a noble gentleman in silk stockings. Upon the poor and uneducated, he had the same power as upon the rich. Shepherds, gipsies, donkey drivers, still sing songs about the English Lord 'who dropped his emeralds in the well', which undoubtedly refer to Orlando, who once, it seems, tore his jewels from him in a moment of rage or intoxication and flung them in a fountain; whence they were fished by a page boy. (WOOLF, 2014, p.79)

This extract indicates the variety of people Orlando met and pleased. His/her charisma was undeniable. He/she is able to establish courtly relations to people from different spheres of society. Observing this trait in Orlando, it is possible to assume that there is multiplicity in his/her character. Still as a young man, there were times in Orlando's life when would disguise to walk among those from a different social class than his:

Hence, he began going frequently to Wapping Old Stairs and the beer gardens at night, wrapped in a grey cloak to hide the star at his neck and the garter at his knee. There, with a mug before him, among the sanded alleys and bowling greens and all the simple architecture of such places, he listened to sailors' stories of hardship and horror and cruelty on the Spanish main; how some had lost their toes, others their noses — for the spoken story was never so rounded or so finely coloured as the written. (WOOLF, 2014 p.12)

These episodes allowed Orlando to expand his perspective. Although Orlando belongs to nobility, he would also learn from sailors and locals' experiences'. Beyond, his disguise also helps him to distanciate from his usual self. Thus, he does not need to follow conventions and noble patterns, so he adopts a different behavior from what is socially expected. However, Anastácio (2006) asserts that Orlando embraces different aspects in different centuries and highlights that there is some kind of continuity in Orlando's essence. Therefore, Orlando has the ability of walking among both lower and higher layers of society, adapting his self to different situations, but it happens in a way he keeps true to his essence. There are other moments in the narrative where this trait is intensely exposed and can be understood more clearly. They mostly appear after Orlando undergoes the sex change – from male to female –, which happens during a period where he is sent to Constantinople, as an ambassador. There, Orlando lives some adventures in a period full of sprees. One morning he is found in his room, in a trance, unable to be awakened. Seven

days go by and Orlando, who was still sleeping, is visited by three figures: Lady of Purity, Lady of Chastity and Lady of Modesty. Here comes the moment which precedes his sex change. The first to enter his place, Lady of Purity claims:

I am the guardian of the sleeping fawn; the snow is dear to me; and the moon rising; and the silver sea. With my robes I cover the speckled hen's eggs and the brindled sea shell; I cover vice and poverty. On all things frail or dark or doubtful, my veil descends. Wherefore, speak not, reveal not. Spare, O spare! (WOOLF, 2014 p. 86)

Through the excerpt "on all things frail or dark or doubtful, my veil descends", one can understand that there was something to be revealed. Subsequently, Lady of Chastity says:

I am she whose touch freezes and whose glance turns to stone. I have stayed the star in its dancing, and the wave as it falls. The highest Alps are my dwelling place; and when I walk, the lightnings flash in my hair; where my eyes fall, they kill. Rather than let Orlando wake, I will freeze him to the bone. Spare, O spare! (WOOLF, 2014 p. 86)

Here, in the excerpt "where my eyes fall, they kill" one may think that Lady of Chastity is killing Orlando. In other words, she may be killing something in who Orlando used to be in order to a new person ascend. Then, comes the third and last one, Lady of Modesty. She speaks:

I am she that men call Modesty. Virgin I am and ever shall be. Not for me the fruitful fields and the fertile vineyard. Increase is odious to me; and when the apples burgeon or the flocks breed, I run, I run; I let my mantle fall. My hair covers my eyes. I do not see. Spare, O spare!' [...] 'Truth come not out from your horrid den. Hide deeper, fearful Truth. For you flaunt in the brutal gaze of the sun things that were better unknown and undone; you unveil the shameful; the dark you make clear, Hide! Hide! Hide! (WOOLF, 2014 p. 86 -87)

As Lady of Modesty evokes "Truth", something fantastic takes place and Orlando finally wakes up. Truth now seems to be revealed. The extract below describes how it happened:

We are, therefore, now left entirely alone in the room with the sleeping Orlando and the trumpeters. The trumpeters, ranging themselves side by side in order, blow one terrific blast:—‘THE TRUTH! at which Orlando woke. 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. (WOOLF, 2014, p.88)

This is the moment when things start taking a different track. Since this research accepts the information given by the biographer as real, Orlando’s sex change is read as something natural. There are many different ways of reading this event, though. One may read it as a metaphor or as a fantastic happening. As mentioned before, there are many moments in which the adaptable quality of Orlando is exposed. Living then, as woman, Orlando enhances her abilities of adapting herself, sometimes alternating her gender. In an episode, Orlando, wearing man’s outfit walks around Leicester Square and meets a woman. Orlando, then, “swept her hat off to her in the manner of a gallant paying his addresses to a lady of fashion in a public place”, bending herself to the masculine force inside her (WOOLF, 2014, p.143). The woman responds positively when she looks up at him “(for a man he was to her) appealing, hoping, trembling, fearing. She rose; she accepted his arm. [...] She led Orlando to the room in Gerrard Street which was her lodging.” (WOOLF, 2014, p.143). Inside, “roused in Orlando all the feelings which become a man. She looked, she felt, she talked like one.” (WOOLF, 2014, p.143). On the other side, she had been “so lately a woman herself” that “she suspected that the girl’s timidity and her hesitating answers and the very fumbling with the key in the latch and the fold of her cloak and the droop of her wrist were all put on to gratify her masculinity”. (WOOLF, 2014, p. 143). Orlando and the woman go upstairs. Then Orlando starts reflecting about the situation she finds herself in. She does not enjoy being in an untrue situation where “the pains which the poor creature had been at to decorate her room and hide the fact that she had no other” did not deceive her. (WOOLF, 2014, p. 143) She feels pity and deception towards the woman, “so that she did not know whether to laugh or to cry.” (WOOLF, 2014, p. 144). And when everything is ready for the action to take place, Orlando cannot bear the situation “in the strangest torment of anger, merriment, and pity she flung off all disguise and admitted herself a woman.” (WOOLF, 2014, p.144) Consequently, the woman intensely laughs.

This episode discloses Orlando’s shifting ability concerning gender. As she cross-dresses as a man, she recalls the feelings of her previous experiences as male. However, the fact that she is dressed as the other sex that will not be enough to tie her up to only one

gender. Melita (2013) points out that Orlando “does not need to cross-dress or prove her masculinity or femininity, because she truly exists as the other gender.” (MELITA, 2013, p.131). Orlando, as a character, represents the free-floating, non-static artifices of gender. More than a gender, Orlando is a fruitful mind, who is able to detach her self from her sex and assume various performances according to what is appropriate for the moment.

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. (WOOLF, 2014 p. 146)

There may be a misunderstanding about the use of the term gender in this extract. Since the debate on gender had not yet emerged at that time, it is natural that the word sex is used to refer gender. On the other hand, there are other ways of reading it. The word sex can be metaphorically or literally read. This research believes that sex, here, is an equivalent to gender. Thus, here is one more evidence that Orlando develops her ability of shifting her gender. Having lived both as man and woman (and also, something in between, sometimes) Orlando acquires new learning from these experiences:

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. The curious of her own sex would argue, for example, if Orlando was a woman, how did she never take more than ten minutes to dress? And were not her clothes chosen rather at random, and sometimes worn rather shabby? And then they would say, still, she has none of the formality of a man, or a man's love of power. She is excessively tender-hearted. She could not endure to see a donkey beaten or a kitten drowned. Yet again, they noted, she detested household matters, was up at dawn and out among the fields in summer before the sun had risen. No farmer knew more about the crops than she did. She could drink with the best and liked games of hazard. She rode well and drove six horses at a gallop over London Bridge. Yet again, though bold and active as a man, it was remarked that the sight of another in danger brought on the most womanly palpitations. She would burst into tears on slight provocation. She was unversed in geography, found mathematics intolerable, and held some caprices which are more common among women than men, as for instance that to travel south is to travel downhill. Whether, then, Orlando was most man or woman, it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided. (WOOLF, 2014, p. 124-125)

The passage above allows one to realize how much Orlando had learned from these experiences. Not only because she had faced life both as man or woman. But because she has lived through about 400 years. Melita (2013) states that Orlando “uses what she learned as a man living in the 16th and 17th centuries to help her become a stronger woman in the centuries that follow.” (MELITA, 2013, p.131). Hence, she has abilities that, at that time, were considered uncommon for women. As described in the excerpt, Orlando is good at growing crops and riding horses. On the other side, she is “excessively tender-hearted” and would not bear to see cruelty happen to animals. The chapter “On androgyny” discusses how such abilities can be considered recurrent things in male or females’ lives. Basically, Sandra Bem’s researches (1976) show that there are tasks that are socially constructed to be performed by men, while others were created to be accomplished by women. The individual who is able to perform multiple tasks, not being restricted about his sex, might be androgynous. Surely, there are also physical features that classify one as androgynous, as explained in the next chapter. In the long run, Orlando represents this adaptable being, whose behavior is unfixed. Orlando’s gender waves and shifts, and so it happens to her beloved ones.

2.3 Gender in Orlando’s Lovers

Being so charming and enchanting, lively Orlando experiences love many times during his life. Although Orlando was desired and adored by numerous people, the biographer points up only two lovers as remarkable ones: Sasha and Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. Orlando meets Sasha during The Great Frost, which was a period of extreme cold winter. At that time, Orlando had not passed through the sex change yet, thus he was still a man. When Orlando sees Sasha “coming from the pavilion of the Muscovite Embassy”, she is 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.” (WOOLF, 2014, p.17). Mystified, Orlando instantly starts to fall in love with Sasha:

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. Images, metaphors of the most extreme and extravagant twined and twisted in his mind. When the boy, for alas, a boy it must be — no woman could skate with such speed and vigour — swept almost on tiptoe past him, Orlando was ready to tear his hair with vexation that the person was of his own sex, and thus all embraces were out of the question. But the skater came closer. 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 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. (WOOLF, 2014, p.17-18).

Clothing, once more, is used in the novel as an artifice to disguise someone's sex. For it can attenuate the shape of someone's body. After Orlando's sex change, this resource is still given its importance. "Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath. It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex." (WOOLF, 2014, p.123). Sasha, moreover, is described as slender. Bem (1975) highlights that androgynous people are usually very thin, since curves are associated with female bodies while muscles are associated to male bodies. Accordingly, binary concepts of gender are not enough to define Sasha. Similarly to Orlando, she is also depicted as androgynous. Orlando and Sasha have a short-lived affair and, as informed by the biographer, Orlando is totally heartbroken when it is over. Still after the sex change, Orlando keeps her feelings for Sacha, which caused her confusion.

And as all Orlando's loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved; and if the consciousness of being of the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had had as a man. For now a thousand hints and mysteries became plain to her that were then dark. Now, the obscurity, which divides the sexes and lets linger innumerable impurities in its gloom, was removed, and if there is anything in what the poet says about truth and beauty, this affection gained in beauty what it lost in falsity. (WOOLF, 2014, p.105)

The passage above illustrates the effects social impositions have in one's behavior. One suffers a sex change, but one's feelings towards people do not change along. The message expressed is: love has no gender. One's sex, that is, a body condition, does not alter how one feels on the inside. One's sex might be determinant in one's experiences in

the world. These experiences might affect how one feels. Orlando's new condition increases her questionings about the world and enriches her existence. Living as a man as well as living as a woman allowed Orlando the freedom to disconnect herself from social constructions. Orlando is not genderless. Orlando is both man and woman. She waves between masculine and feminine forces, which complement each other. Sometimes, she balances these two forces inside her, being able to detach herself from limitations, thus reaching androgyny. Whether Sasha has the same shifts of gender as Orlando there is not enough evidences. On the other side, the same cannot be said about Shelmerdine. Living as a woman in the Victorian period, Orlando starts feeling the pressure to find a husband. As she walks out the door of her house, she meets Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. "And then, in the space of three seconds and a half, everything had changed — she had broken her ankle, fallen in love, married Shelmerdine." (WOOLF, 2014, p.177). Even though they instantly get married, as they are influenced by the period in which they are living, the connection between the couple seems natural and fluid.

though their acquaintance had been so short, they had guessed, as always happens between lovers, everything of any importance about each other in two seconds at the utmost, and it now remained only to fill in such unimportant details as what they were called; where they lived; and whether they were beggars or people of substance. (WOOLF, 2014, p. 168)

Although things happened very fast, it seems Orlando and Shelmerdine have a singular bond, where one perfectly fits each other. In a conversation they assume "*You're a woman, Shel!*" she cried. "*You're a man, Orlando!*" he cried." (WOOLF, 2014, p.168). It seems Orlando recognizes feminine features in Shelmerdine, as Shelmerdine recognizes masculine traits in Orlando. This recognition also occurs in other moments:

'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. (WOOLF, 2014, p.172-173)

Orlando's experiences as a man helped her to understand better both of the sexes. She realizes that there is something of man in woman and vice and versa. Woolf (1929) believes that there are both feminine and masculine forces inside the individuals. Butler (1990) sees gender as free-floating and non-static. Since Woolf (1929) recognizes that one's mind might reach different states, that it may shift and wave between the sexes, it seems both authors agree on the mutable and dynamic character of gender. Through the creation of Orlando, Woolf depicts the nature of human's essence, emphasizing its change abilities and unfixed qualities. "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." (WOOLF, 2014, p. 124). Hence, clothing would a mere artifice used to keep external appearances in the service of social conventions, while gender exists on the inside, independent upon one's bodily sex.

3. ON ANDROGYNY

3.1 A Debate toward Androgyny

Along the boom of feminism and other social movements in the 1970's, a variety of issues related to gender, class and race emerged. Concepts such as femininity and masculinity, as well as androgyny, started being discussed. Carolyn Heilbrun (1974), an American feminist writer and professor, recalls the construction of the word androgyny as a combination of "the Greek roots andro (male) and gyne (female)." (HEILBRUN, 1974, p.143). In her book *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973), she defines androgyny as "a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes and the human impulses expressed by men and women are not rigidly assigned." (HEILBRUN, 1973, ONLINE). She thinks androgyny is related to "a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety of costume". In other words, androgyny corresponds to a behavior which is not limited by one single sex. Androgynous beings will act as they might, they will not feel restricted to cultural or social impositions upon their sex.

Sandra Bem, an American psychologist, also contributed for the studies on gender and androgyny. She applied researches on students from Stanford University (23 male and 19 female undergraduates). They were supposed to "judge a series of behaviors for their sex role connotations" and "indicate on a 7-point scale how masculine or feminine each of 12 activities would be considered "by American society generally". (BEM, 1975, p. 635). Among these twelve activities were, for instance, "Playing with a six-week-old baby kitten" and "Saying what you believe, even when you know those around you disagree." (BEM, 1975, p. 635). Hence, she created the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), "which contains both a Masculinity Scale and a Femininity Scale, each of which contains 20 personality characteristics selected on the basis of sex typed social desirability." (BEM, 1975, p. 635). A person, when taking the test, has to indicate on a 7-point scale in how accurately each of these masculine and feminine personality features describes himself. The scale is composed from 1-7, being number 1 "Never or almost never true" and number 7 "Always or almost true" (1975 p. 635). Besides, "each person receives an "Androgyny Score" defined as Student's t ratio for the difference between his or her endorsement of masculine

and feminine personality characteristics.” (1975 p. 635). The results of this specific research, which was also “the first empirical demonstration” that in fact, there are people who belong to a distinct class and “can appropriately be termed androgynous, whose sex role adaptability enables them to engage in situationally effective behavior without regard for its stereotype as masculine or feminine.” (1975, p. 643) Thus, Sandra Bem was able to prove the existence of something that had already appeared in literature: the androgynous human being.

About androgyny, Bem (1975) believes that the system of sex role differentiation, at that time, had “outlived its usefulness” and it had served only to “prevent both men and women from developing as full and complete human beings.” (p. 634). When Woolf (1929) thinks of the term androgyny, she thinks that it is best state for one to create something significant. The androgynous mind is able to use fully and completely its faculties. Accordingly, a mind which is restricted to a single sex would enjoy the same liberty. Also, Bem seems to be criticizing what Butler, later, would call the binary imposition of gender, which is in service of patriarchy. Bem still argues that the androgynous beings feel “encouraged to be both instrumental and expressive, both assertive and yielding, both masculine and feminine—depending upon the situational appropriateness of these various behaviors.” (p. 634) Because the androgynous person does not exclude neither masculinity or femininity from his or her self-definition, he is “able to remain sensitive to the changing constraints of the situation and engage in whatever behavior seems most effective at the moment, regardless of its stereotype as appropriate for one sex or the other.” (BEM, 1975, p. 634-635). Comparing Butler’s (1990) and Bem’s (1975) ideas, one can find similarities, for both of them believe in the possibility of adaptability in human beings. They engage in the idea that some individuals assume different performances according to the appropriateness of the situation they are in. Moreover, Bem (1975) points out something that both Coleridge (2015) and Woolf (1929) had previously observed. She declares that “greater intellectual development has been correlated quite consistently with cross sex typing, that is, with masculinity in girls and with femininity in boys”. (BEM, 1975 p.635) In other words, androgynous individuals are more likely to develop higher intelligence. Whereas people who are more sex typed are supposed to have “lower overall intelligence, lower spatial ability, and lower creativity.” (1975, p.635)

Similarly to Woolf (1929), Bem sees androgyny as “the equal endorsement of both masculine and feminine attributes.” (BEM, 1975 p.636). Thus, androgyny does not mean sexless or genderless. Androgyny means the power of achieving the balance between masculine and feminine. And how can one benefit from this condition? Bem (1976) exemplifies how one can combine the best of each sex to achieve usefulness in his actions. By blending “complementary modalities into a single act” such as being able to fire an employee if the circumstances warrant it, but to do so with sensitivity for the human emotion that such an act inevitably produces.” (BEM, 1976, p.1016). Moreover, Bem (1976) found out in her research that androgynous individuals have higher self-esteem than those who are fixed to single a sex type. Besides, Bem (1975) hopes that “androgynous individual will someday come to define a new and more human standard of psychological health.” (1975, p.643). Overall, it seems that there are many advantages in being androgynous.

3.2 The Implications of Androgyny in Orlando

Since Orlando experiences both masculinity and femininity throughout the novel, as he undergoes a sex change, it is common that these two forces inside him intermix, thus reaching androgyny. In some occasions, exposed in the previous chapter, Orlando bends himself to the feminine, in others, he is inclined to the masculine. Furthermore, there are times when Orlando totally detaches himself from gender impositions and uses his experiences both as a man and as a woman to write.

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. It was a most bewildering and whirling state of mind to be in. The comforts of ignorance seemed utterly denied her. She was a feather blown on the gale. Thus it is no great wonder, as she pitted one sex against the other, and found each alternately full of the most deplorable infirmities, and was not sure to which she belonged — it was no great wonder that she was about to cry out that she would return to Turkey and become a gipsy again when the anchor fell with a great splash into the sea; the sails came tumbling on deck, and she perceived (so sunk had she been in thought that she had seen nothing for several days) that the ship was anchored off the coast of Italy. (WOOLF, 2014, p. 103)

The passage above is another example on how Orlando's gender non-static. Moreover, Orlando is able to achieve the balance between both sexes, reaching androgyny. Being an androgynous being, Orlando is, then, more likely to adapt his self according to the moment. "The task is made still more difficult by the fact that she found it convenient at this time to change frequently from one set of clothes to another." (WOOLF, 2014, p.146) There are situations, previously mentioned, where he dresses up as the a lower class individual, or cross-dresses as the other sex. These are all examples that Orlando is, in fact, able to shift gender as well as he is to incarnate androgyny.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler explores the case of Herculine, a hermaphrodite. The author explains that in such "occasions convergence and disorganization of rules that govern sex/gender/desire." (BUTLER, 1990, p. 23). Similarly to Herculine, Orlando (even though being a literary character) do not seem to follow these rules. Because it is not only Orlando's gender that waves, but also his sexuality. He also falls in love for both sexes. Hence, his desire and feelings do not change along with his body. They evolve along with time. Therefore, Orlando would not be "categorizable within the gender binary as it stands." (BUTLER, 1990, p.23) Neither would he be considered heterosexual, for there is convergence in both heterosexuality and homosexuality in his self.

Moreover, Orlando's gender fits Butler's concept of Intelligibility. "Intelligible" genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire." (BUTLER, 1990 p.17). Waving genders, such as Orlando's, are not easy for one to understand or classify. As he refuses to perform only the gender society expects him to, he consequently differentiates himself.

Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (BUTLER, 1990, p.17)

The construction of Orlando is not based upon his personality, instead, it is based upon his essence. There is some flexibility in his self, which is maintained throughout the years. Moreover, Orlando's most defining characteristic is that he is a writer. During the whole novel, he is described as someone who was born to write and this quality stays with

him until the end of the narrative. Despite, it is not gender that merely defines his self. “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results” (BUTLER, 1990 p.25). Thus, these multiples expressions contribute for the constitution of one’s identity. But they are not the only responsables for it.

these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter’s hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own, call them what you will [...] for everybody can multiply from his own experience the different terms which his different selves have made with him — and some are too wildly ridiculous to be mentioned in print at all. (WOOLF, 2014, p.209)

Woolf indicates that one’s self is built upon multiple selves. It matches Bem’s (1975) and Butler’s (1990) ideas toward performance and adaptability. All of these features might be seen in Orlando, for he is a construction based upon human nature. In other Woolf’s novels, such as *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *The Waves* (1931), the multiplicity of the self is also exposed. Thus, one may say that the human self, to Woolf, is much more complex than simple binary definitions. It goes beyond stereotypes. It is adaptable and unfixed. Being presented as adaptable, and more than intelligent, a genius, Orlando fits the considerations upon androgynous discussed in this research. Hence, one may assure that there is much of androgynous in Orlando.

CONCLUSION

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) represents the fluidity and changeability of the human being. It is interesting to notice that in 1928 Woolf's novel advanced questions that started being debated almost 50 years after its publication. Literature, here, – as it often does – exposes features of human behavior that are still sometimes silenced. Orlando is a fictional character inspired in real people. He experiences both masculinity and femininity, thus acquiring a bigger amount of knowledge than those who do not. Because of all the distinct events Orlando undergoes, he learns to use the best of each sex. It enables him to see the world from different perspectives. He experiences what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman. Besides, he freely shifts gender according to the appropriateness of the moment. His adaptability enables him to walk among different spheres in society, embodying different personas. As a consequence, he broadens his experience, fact that later furnishes content to his writing. Orlando is a literary illustration of the performances Judith Butler discusses in *Gender Trouble* (1990). He is a representation of an individual to whom concepts of binary gender are not applicable. Orlando's gender is free-floating, dynamic and non-static. In other words, it varies.

In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf discusses geniality, proposing it is related to androgyny. When Orlando balances both masculine and feminine forces in his essence, he reaches the most suitable state of mind for one to create a work of art. It is after he experiences life both as man and as woman that he finally feels prepared to finish the poem he has been working on through centuries, "The Oak Tree". It is through this poem that Orlando finally achieves literary success and is praised by critics. Nick Greene, his contemporaneous fellow, who is also a writer, does not suffer a sex change during the novel. Neither does he seem to wave his gender. Hence, Greene fits the standard behavior approved by society. Moreover, it is interesting to observe that Nick Greene, who is fixed to his gender, does not achieve the same success as Orlando does. Through the analysis of Woolf's *Orlando*, we can explore not only the instability of human essence, but also the features of a genius.

Another interesting thing to observe is the changes in Orlando: a writer as a man, and later a writer as a woman. During his lifetime as a man, Orlando never asks if writing is suitable for him. As a (married) woman, however, Orlando stops her writing to think of possible consequences this might bring upon her. She also questions whether this activity, which she loves so much, is something allowed for a woman. The contrast in these situations is huge. Orlando, a nobleman, explores all the possibilities in his life. There is no dream he cannot chase or achieve, for he has health, beauty, money and nobility. The only dreamy ambition he cannot realize is love, through a committed relationship with Sacha, because that is something that does not depend exclusively on him. Moreover, Orlando, as a man, feels comfortable to write at any place, any time, in front of anyone. He does not seem bothered by external conditions. He writes while he is in contact with nature, sitting on the grass. He also writes in open rooms. He writes when he is traveling to exotic places. The same does not occur in his existence as a woman. Why? Because women, as Woolf recalls (1929), were still censured for producing literature at the time portrayed in the novel. Women had to face the phantom of the Angel in the House, which Orlando, after experiencing both sides of the coin, is able to ignore. But, first, Orlando had to detach herself from the social impositions upon gender. It is just then, when she balances both masculine and feminine forces, that she reaches androgyny, being able to finally complete her poem.

On the other hand, many of the struggles women had while working to improve their writing have become attenuated as time went by. Thanks to Feminism and other social movements, which are becoming each day more popular in Western society, a higher number of women are claiming their right to speech and action. Women are rising their voices and expressing their will. It is still a challenge for women to freely expose their body experiences, though. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf vindicates physical and literary space for women. Even though women still have to struggle to afford their space, I believe they are receiving more opportunities to be read and heard. I agree with Woolf (2015) that the biggest challenge for women's writers is to tell the truth about the experiences of the body. In many circumstances, women are still haunted than men by what others might possibly think, or by what society might say. Women are still judged by exploring their sexuality. Although this is something that many have previously talked about, it is definitely an issue to be further discussed.

Orlando: A Biography depicts a period of 400 years in the history of England, from the sixteenth century up to the early twentieth. The fact that Orlando, somehow, adapts his way of living to the different ages he finds himself in, indicates that he is androgynous. In order to portray a series of historical changes as the background of the novel, Woolf would not have developed a better strategy than to build an androgynous character. Why do I say that? Because Woolf (2012) preaches about harmony in writing. The novel would not reach the same tone if Orlando had a fixed personality, being always attached to a specific period in which he had lived, centuries ago. Had it been different Orlando would not be able to evolve through time.

My proposal for this research was to analyze the intersections involving writing, gender and androgyny in the novel *Orlando: A Biography*. These three topics constantly intermix, because they have a close connection. Orlando, the protagonist, is always depicted as someone gifted and charming, with special aptitude for writing. His flexibility, a consequence of androgyny, allows him to walk into and out of new situations. Orlando seems not to have difficulty in shifting his gender, he does that whenever he pleases. He benefits from this situation by having a wider range of experience than his sex typed acquaintances, and that helps him to better understand both sexes. Also, as a woman, Orlando is more likely to detach herself from gender stereotypes, for she has previously lived as a man. Hence, Orlando might ignore more easily the hauntings of the Angel in the House and the judgement from society. This is surely the most remarkable feature Orlando, as a writer, can use to achieve his aspirations.

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