Orlando

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

Adeline Virginia Stephen was born the third of four children to Julia Prinsep Jackson, a famous model for the group of Victorian painters known as the Pre-Raphaelites, and Leslie Stephen, a noted historian and biographer. Woolf grew up in a privileged household and was homeschooled as a child with a focus on Victorian literature. In 1895, her mother died of influenza, followed by her half-sister, Stella, in 1897. Woolf attended King's College London, where she studied literature and history and began to write seriously in 1900. Woolf's father died in 1905, and she moved with her siblings to Bloomsbury, a district in London known for its cultural and educational institutions. Living in Bloomsbury, Woolf's circle of friends, including her brothers' friends from Cambridge, formed a group of elite writers, artists, and philosophers known later as the Bloomsbury Group. The Bloomsbury Group had a deep respect and appreciation for art in all its forms, and they adamantly rejected the strict Victorian conventions and beliefs of their parents. The Bloomsbury Group boasted such members as E. M. Forster, Roger Fry, and Lytton Strachey, and it was where Woolf met her future husband, Leonard. The couple married in 1912, and in 1915, Woolf published her first novel, *The Voyage Out*. In 1917, Leonard and Virginia Woolf together opened the Hogarth Press, a publishing house in London, but her next novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, was not published until 1925. Beginning with her mother's death, Woolf struggled with mental health issues and severe bouts of depression and anxiety. During her life, Woolf was hospitalized on multiple occasions, and she twice attempted suicide. Woolf's doctors warned her that reading and writing would aggravate her condition, and she was often prescribed alternating rest and physical exertion. In 1922, Woolf met Harold Nicolson and his wife, Vita Sackville-West, both successful writers, and Woolf and Sackville-West began a love affair that lasted most of the 1920s. By the early 1930s, their relationship had morphed into one of deep friendship, but Sackville-West was an exceedingly important part of Woolf's life. Then a very popular writer, Sackville-West began to publish her books through the Hogarth Press, which reportedly saved the business from bankruptcy, and she encouraged Woolf to continue writing against the advice of her doctors. Indeed, Woolf did write, and she published *To the Lighthouse* in 1927 and *Orlando*, an experimental biography and love letter of sorts to Sackville-West, in 1928. Woolf is also remembered as an influential critic and essayist, of which *A Room of One's Own*, published in 1929, is among her most famous. On the morning of March 28, 1941, at the age of 59, Woolf loaded her pockets with rocks and walked into the River Ouse near her home in Sussex and drowned.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In *Orlando*, Orlando first sees Sasha skating on the River Thames during the festival of the Great Frost. Throughout history, there have been several Great Frosts to settle over England and Europe, including the Great Frosts of 1683 and 1708; however, it is likely that Woolf is referring to the Great Frost of 1608, in which the very first frost fair was held in London. During December of 1607, a massive cold spell settled over Great Britain, Europe, and Iceland. Temperatures plummeted, killing people and livestock, and the River Thames froze completely over. The coast of the North Sea froze as well, and all shipping and trading halted for over three months. Just as Woolf describes, ships were frozen in the harbor and giant icebergs floated out to the open water. Frost fairs offered merchants and businesses an opportunity to recuperate some of their lost revenue on account of the cold, and Londoners took to the frozen surface of the Thames River for sledding, ice skating, and carnival games. Frost fairs typically lasted only a few days but did not start to shut down until the ice began to melt, often trapping people and attractions out on the melting river. The ice usually melted rapidly, often in less than a day's time, and it led to several deaths over the centuries. The greatest frost fair is said to have been held during the Great Frost of 1683, one of the coldest winters on record in England, and the last frost fair was held during the Great Frost of 1814. After the final frost fair of 1814, the Thames River did not again freeze over until 1963 and has not since.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

During the modernist movement, several writers set out to redefine the biography. Woolf's father, Leslie Stephen, was a respected biographer of the Victorian era, and he set the bar as the first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, which Woolf mentions in *Orlando*. The *Dictionary of National Biography*, or *DNB* for short, is a reference book of notable British figures throughout history that still exists today, but modernist writers held a very different view of biographical writing. The experimental form employed by Woolf in *Orlando* was greatly influenced by Lytton Strachey's 1918 publication of *Eminent Victorians*. Strachey's book of four portraits, or individual biographies, chronicles the lives of four important and influential Victorians, including Florence Nightingale and Cardinal Manning; however, Strachey paints his subjects in a highly unflattering light. He downplays their good qualities and focuses on the negative, the exact opposite approach of

traditional biographies, which tend to focus only on the good qualities of a subject and gloss over the bad. Woolf was also influenced by Harold Nicolson's *Some People*, published the year before *Orlando* in 1927. Nicolson's book offers nine biographical portraits, some "of real people in imaginary situations" and some of "imaginary people in real situations." Woolf was influenced by several other writers and famous works as well, a great number of which she mentions both directly and indirectly in *Orlando*, including Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, by Laurence Sterne.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Orlando: A Biography*
- **When Written:** 1927-1928
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1928
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction; Experimental Biography
- **Setting:** London and Constantinople, spanning from the 16th to the 20th century
- **Climax:** October 11, 1928, when Orlando wakes at 10:00 a.m. to "the present moment."
- **Antagonist:** Society
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Bad Housekeeping. In the 1930s, Woolf wrote a series of articles for *Good Housekeeping* magazine about life in London. Woolf's articles focused mainly on art, literature, and politics, not the domestic sphere, as Woolf was reported to be a notoriously bad housekeeper who once accidentally baked her wedding ring into a rice pudding.

Monkey Business. Like Orlando, Woolf was an avid animal lover, and she had several pets throughout her life, including numerous dogs, a squirrel, and a beloved Marmoset monkey named Mitzi.

PLOT SUMMARY

Orlando swings his sword at the "Pagan" head of a Moor hanging from the rafters of his father's expansive English mansion. Orlando's father—or perhaps grandfather—took the head while riding "in the barbarous fields of Africa," and Orlando is eager to follow in their footsteps. For now, however, he is just 16, and terribly late to meet the Queen. A loud whistle announces Queen Elizabeth I's arrival, and Orlando rushes to change his **clothes**. He runs to the reception line and bows down before the Queen with a bowl of rose water just in time for her "nervous, crabbed, [and] sickly" hands to accept his offering. Orlando never looks up, but the Queen falls in love with the top of his head and considers him "the very image of a noble gentleman." Two years later, the Queen invites Orlando to join her court at Whitehall and makes him her "Treasurer and Steward." Orlando lives a lavish life surrounded by many beautiful and adoring women, but his first love is poetry. He has "the wildest, most absurd, extravagant ideas about poets and poetry," and he is a prolific writer of prose and poetry himself, all "very long" and "abstract." Orlando is soon betrothed to Lady Margaret—or Euphrosyne, as she is known "in his sonnets"—but he quickly falls in love with Sasha, a Muscovite princess, whom he meets during the festival of the Great Frost. They make plans to run away together, but when Orlando goes to meet her just as the Thames River begins to melt, he sees the ship of the Russian Ambassador moving out to sea, and he knows Sasha is onboard.

After Sasha's deception, Orlando is crushed, and since he had made no attempt to hide his feelings for Sasha from Euphrosyne, he is a complete disgrace at court. Depressed and dejected, Orlando fails to wake at his usual time on Saturday, the 18th of June, and sleeps without "any sign of life" for a week. On the seventh day, Orlando wakes at his usual time with an "imperfect recollection of his past life." He is examined by a whole slew of doctors who prescribe a myriad of treatments, including rest and starvation, and ultimately agree that Orlando has indeed been asleep for a week. As a biographer, the narrator acknowledges that Orlando's case is quite unbelievable, but it is their duty "to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may."

Increasingly depressed and obsessed with death, Orlando turns to the therapeutic effects of writing, and works on his poem, "**The Oak Tree**," which he has been writing for several years. He also writes a friend, an acquaintance of several poets, and asks him to invite Nicolas Greene, "a very famous writer," to Orlando's home for a visit. Greene accepts, and he tells Orlando over dinner that poetry in England is "dead." Shakespeare and Marlowe only write for money, Greene says, and have no "Glawr," or "divine ambition." The Greeks were great, Greene claims, not the Elizabethans. After Greene's visit with Orlando, Greene returns home and writes a satirical "roast" of Orlando, in which he negatively reviews Orlando's original play, the *Death of Hercules*, calling it "wordy and bombastic in the extreme." Crushed again, Orlando returns to the comfort of "The Oak Tree," and later meets the Archduchess Harriet Griselda. However, Orlando realizes that his feelings for the Archduchess are "Lust the vulture, not Love, the Bird of Paradise," so he asks King Charles to send him as an Ambassador to Constantinople.

During his time in Constantinople, Orlando fulfills his duties as Ambassador with "admiration," and he is even awarded a

Dukedom. But, the narrator claims, a great fire broke out during the Revolution, and most official records were lost. "We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain," the narrator says, "but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to make use of the imagination." On the day Sir Adrian Scrope delivers Orlando's patent of nobility, Orlando throws an extravagant ball, during which, according to rumor, "some kind of miracle" is going to be performed. When Orlando accepts his patent and Dukedom but no miracle occurs, the crowd of people begins to riot, and Sir Adrian and "a squad of British bluejackets" must hold them back.

Later that night, a figure is seen embracing a "woman of the peasant class" on Orlando's balcony, and the next morning, Orlando again fails to wake at his usual time. Doctors are called and Orlando is examined. His room is quite trashed, and there are several papers thrown about, including some poetry about oak trees and a marriage deed issued to Orlando and a "gipsy" dancer named Rosita Pepita. He again sleeps for a week, and when he wakes on the seventh day, Orlando is a woman. Orlando's change has occurred so "painlessly and completely" that she is not in the least bit surprised by it. "The change of sex," the narrator declares, "though it altered [Orlando's] future, did nothing whatever to alter [Orlando's] identity." Orlando immediately dresses and leaves the house, heading straight to the lands of the "gipsies." She lives with them for some time, but they have no ink or paper, so Orlando heads back to England.

Aboard the ship to England, Orlando begins to understand "the penalties and the privileges of her position." She is much the same person she has always been, but the addition of a petticoat has altered things significantly. Living as a woman involves "the most tedious discipline," and Orlando is expected to dress, look, and smell impeccably. Orlando isn't, of course, naturally this way, and it takes several hours out of her day to accomplish. Orlando continues writing her poem, "The Oak Tree," and she immerses herself in London society. At a party given by Lady R., whose drawing room is said to be the wellspring of intellect and genius, Orlando meets Alexander Pope, a famous poet of the 18th century, and asks him to come home with her. He does, and Orlando's home consequently becomes the favorite meeting place of famous poets. Orlando decides to keep a book to record all the witty things they say, but the book remains empty, and she quietly works on her poem. Before Orlando knows it, the 18th century ends, and the 19th century begins.

With the new century comes a new queen and a new climate, and a "dampness" settles over England. Orlando is completely at odds with the new era and finds it impossible to write. A "tingling and vibration" consumes her body, originating in "the second finger of her left hand," and Orlando decides she must get married, "in the spirit of the age," if she is ever to finish her poem. Orlando takes a walk in the park, and after she trips and breaks her ankle, she meets Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. Orlando and Shel are engaged in minutes, and the next day, Shel looks to Orlando suddenly. "Orlando, you're a man!" Shel exclaims. "Shel, you're a woman!" Orlando responds. They are married on Orlando's estate, but no one hears the word "Obey" spoken before the passing of the rings.

Shel is a sailor and is frequently gone around the Cape Horn, and Orlando is left alone to put the finishing touches on "The Oak Tree." She has, after all, been writing it for more than 300 years now. "Done!" Orlando yells, stepping away from the poem for the last time. She knows it must be read, and she immediately heads into London. In the city, Orlando runs into Nicolas Greene, who is now "the most influential critic of the Victorian age." After Greene laments the state of poetry in England—Shakespeare and Marlowe, "those were the giants," he says—Orlando's dress pops open, and "The Oak Tree" falls from her bosom. Greene reads the poem immediately and, claiming it reminiscent of the great Elizabethans, insists that it must be published. After Orlando and Greene part, Orlando rushes to wire Shel a telegram and tell him the great news about her poem, and then she wanders into a bookstore. She buys several of Greene's critical works, tells the shopkeeper to "send her everything of any importance," and begins to read. She learns that critics expect writers to "always write like someone else," and that all of Victorian literature can be either written "out in sixty volumes octavo," or squeezed "into six lines the length of this one." After coming to this conclusion, Orlando looks out the window for a long time, and on "March the 20th, at three o'clock in the morning," the midwife hands Orlando a baby. "It's a very fine boy, M'Lady," the midwife says.

Orlando again stands at the window. "But let the reader take courage," the narrator says, "nothing of the same sort is going to happen today, which is not, by any means, the same day." The world outside is changing. Light floods houses with the flip of a switch, and water is hot in seconds. A nearby clock strikes. It is 10 a.m. on October 11, 1928, and it is "the present moment." Orlando stops and grabs at her heart. There is not a more "terrifying revelation," the narrator notes, "than that it is the present moment."

Orlando hops in her car and drives. She has some shopping to do in town, but she leaves without most of her list. "This is the oncome of middle age," Orlando says. "How strange it is!" She drives until she comes to a cottage and farm and gets out of the car. "Orlando?" Orlando cries out, "Orlando?" When no one answers, Orlando gets back in her car and drives home. Walking through the many empty rooms of her sprawling mansion, Orlando thinks of the numerous parties and people who graced the rooms over the past centuries and feels a sort of depressed nostalgia.

She walks out to the garden and down a remote path to an old oak tree. Orlando places her poem, "The Oak Tree," at the base of the tree and looks to the sky. She can see an airplane flying

overhead, and she knows that Shel is onboard. "Here, Shel, here!" Orlando yells to the sky. Shel jumps from the airplane, and as he does, "a single wild bird" flies up over his head. "It is the goose!" Orlando yells. "The wild goose..." and then "the twelfth stroke of midnight" strikes on "Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-eight."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Orlando – The protagonist of *Orlando* and the wife of Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire. Orlando is first introduced as a 16-year-old boy living in the 16th century during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The Queen falls in love with Orlando, and he is thrown into a lavish life surrounded by women who fawn over him. Although Orlando loves many women, his first loves are nature and poetry, and he works on his poem, "**The Oak Tree**," for most of the novel. Since Orlando lives for nearly 400 years, the poem goes through many changes of style, language, and form. Orlando also changes, and he mysteriously transforms into a woman. Despite this seemingly radical change, however, Orlando remains largely the same person. In this vein, Woolf implies through the character of Orlando that both gender and literary genres and conventions are socially constructed. Orlando spends much time and effort attempting to conform to society's idea of a woman and literary critics' idea of a writer, but Woolf argues that to fully conform to either is impossible. Ultimately, Orlando concludes that she is a mixture of numerous selves, and to conform to any one ideal is to deny who she really is. The character of Orlando is also a fictionalized representation of Woolf's friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West. Indeed, Orlando's life and history are Sackville-West's; many of Orlando's experiences, and particularly Orlando's family's estate, are based on Sackville-West's book, *Knole and the Sackvilles*, published in 1922. *Knole and the Sackville*s focuses on Sackville-West's family history and their shared estate, Knole. Woolf's basis for *Orlando* was never a secret. She dedicates the book to Sackville-West, and Sackville-West even sat for many of the pictures of Orlando used in the book. Moreover, most of the other paintings in the book of Orlando and the other characters are from Sackville-West's private collection and the collection at Knole. While many of the book's references are likely private and known only to Sackville-West and the other members of the Bloomsbury Group, a clear parallel can be drawn between the life of Sackville-West and the incredible life of Orlando.

Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire / Shel – Orlando's husband. Orlando meets Shel, as she often calls him, during the 19th century, and they are engaged within minutes. Shel has many feminine qualities and traits, and Orlando says he is "as subtle and strange as a woman." Using the book's fictional biographer as a mouthpiece, Woolf claims the sexes "intermix," and that each person "vacillates" between the two, and Shel is a prime example of this. Despite Orlando's own transition from man to woman, she is still primarily attracted to women, and Shel's womanly features seem to be what appeals most to her. Likewise, it is largely Orlando's masculine traits that attract Shel as well. Shel is a sailor, often gone sailing around the Cape Horn, the southernmost tip of South America, near the Drake Passage. The Drake Passage, where the Atlantic and Pacific oceans meet, is a famous route of passage to the New World, and it is known for being incredibly treacherous and dangerous to pass. This implies, despite his effeminate personae, that Shel is also very brave and even heroic, which further serves to disrupt popular gender stereotypes. Shel and Orlando are married on Orlando's estate, but no one hears the word "Obey" spoken as the rings are passed. Wedding ceremonies typically entail vows to love, honor, and obey, and with the omission of the last, Woolf suggests that she deeply disagrees with this notion and considers it oppressive. To "obey" puts one beneath the other and promotes an unequal distribution of power. In this vein, Woolf suggest that a marriage should occur between equals and not require one to "obey" the other.

Nicholas Greene – A very famous writer and critic whom Orlando first meets during the Elizabethan era. According to Greene, poetry is "dead" in England, and poets like Shakespeare and Marlowe only write for money. He claims they have no "divine ambition," or "Glawr," and he finds more to appreciate in the poetry of the ancient Greeks. Orlando asks Greene to read his original play, the *Death of Hercules*, but Greene is initially hesitant until Orlando offers to pay him a quarterly pension. Greene finds the *Death of Hercules* "wordy and bombastic in the extreme," and he proceeds to write a satire based on a noble Lord who is obviously Orlando. Orlando is crushed but continues to pay Greene's pension. Greene again meets Orlando during the Victorian era, and Greene again claims that poetry is "dead" in England. However, this time he claims that the Elizabethans, like Shakespeare and Marlowe, were the true talents. He also changes his opinion of Orlando's work after he reads "**The Oak Tree**." Greene claims Orlando's poem reminds him of Addison and has nothing of the "modern spirit." Greene only appreciates writing when it is reminiscent of traditional literature, and he represents literary critics who resist contemporary literature and favor only traditional forms. Greene's hypocrisy makes critics, especially Victorian critics, appear incredibly hypocritical, and it is in this way that Woolf argues poets should write for themselves, not the critics, whose opinions are often meaningless.

Alexander Pope – An English poet from the early 18th century. Pope is one of the poets Orlando admires, and she repeats Pope's name repeatedly "like an incantation." Orlando finally meets Pope at Lady R.'s reception room, where he shatters the "illusion" of truth by saying three witty things in a row. Orlando

asks Pope to go home with her, and he accepts. In the carriage on the poorly lit streets, Orlando's view of Pope is obscured as she admires him for his genius. However, as the carriage moves through the light of an oil lamp, Pope's true form is revealed: "When one sees you plain, how ignoble, how despicable you are! Deformed and weakly, there is nothing to venerate in you, much to pity, most to despise." Pope suffered from tuberculosis of the spine as a child, which left him with hunchback for the rest of his life, and he only stood about four and a half feet tall. Orlando's words are certainly harsh, but Woolf's point is clear: like the other poets Orlando meets, Pope is an ordinary person who is flawed, and, other than his published works, there is nothing exceptional about him whatsoever. Later, Pope asks Orlando to read "the rough draught of a certain famous line from the 'Characters of Women.'" "Of the Characters of Women" is an essay and letter to women written by Pope in 1735, in which he writes: "Nothing so true as what you once let fall, / Most Women have no Characters at all." Orlando is truly offended by Pope's poor opinion of women, and she loses some of her reverence for him. In this vein, Woolf implies that Pope is not just ordinary, but his work is far from perfect as well.

The Shabby Man / William Shakespeare – An English poet and playwright of the 16th century. Of all the poets Orlando admires, Shakespeare is arguably the poet Orlando admires most. Orlando even finds it difficult to speak Shakespeare's name because she reveres him so "deeply." The novel mentions Shakespeare several times, both directly and indirectly. She refers to several of his plays, such as *Macbeth* and *Othello*, and the name Orlando is also the name of the lead character in Shakespeare's play, *As You Like It*. While Orlando is not aware of it, he encounters Shakespeare as a young man. Woolf implies that Shakespeare is the "shabby man" sitting at the servants' table in the beginning of the novel, but Orlando has no idea who the man is. Like many of the other poets in the novel, Woolf does not deny Shakespeare's talent, but she also portrays him as a regular person who is not exceptional in the least. Shakespeare is overweight, his clothes are "shabby" and dirty, and he only rates a seat at the servants' table, not the main dining room. Woolf at once depicts Shakespeare as the epitome of talent and poetry and as a completely ordinary person who does not seem worthy of such worship and praise.

Jonathan Swift – An Irish essayist and satirist from the early 18th century. Orlando meets Swift after she befriends Alexander Pope. Swift represents the accomplished writers and poets whom Orlando idolizes, and the narrator quotes a passage of his prose satire, *Gulliver's Travels*, published in 1726. Swift was an important Anglo-Irish satirist, so much so that satire in general is often referred to as "Swiftian." *Orlando* is indeed "Swiftian," which reflects Swift's influence on Woolf herself. Woolf, using the narrator as a mouthpiece, claims that Swift is "brutal, yet so kind," and that he "talks baby language to a girl, and will die, can we doubt it, in a madhouse." The love of Swift's life, Esther Johnson, whom he called Stella, was several years younger than he was, and he reportedly met her when she was just eight years old. She died young, and Swift suffered her loss deeply. He struggled with mental health issues and had a stroke later in life which left him paralyzed and unable to talk. Swift slowly went insane, and after his death, he willed his fortune to fund a hospital for the mentally ill in Dublin, which is still in operation today. Swift's struggle with mental illness mirrors Woolf's own struggle, and he further underscores that fact that while famous writers and poets of the past were no doubt great, they suffered and struggled just like ordinary people.

The Archduchess Harriet Griselda / Archduke Harry – A nobleman who falls in love with Orlando by simply looking at a painting of him. The Archduke moves near Orlando's estate in London and dresses as a woman, disguising himself as an Archduchess to deceive Orlando. Orlando is indeed duped, but he soon realizes that the feelings he has for the Archduchess are lust, not love, and Orlando runs to Constantinople. After Orlando returns to England as a woman, the Archduke hears of Orlando's change and immediately goes to her estate. He explains himself, apologizes, and begins to court Orlando; however, Orlando does not reciprocate his feelings. Orlando must cheat at a parlor game to make herself less attractive to the Archduke, and she is successful. The Archduke angrily leaves, but he does later forgive Orlando for her own deceit. The character of the Archduke serves to disrupt popular stereotypes of gender and sexuality, and he is another reflection of the narrator's assertion that the sexes "intermix." According to the narrator, "a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place" in every human being and "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."

Nell – A prostitute whom Orlando meets some time during in the 18th century. When Orlando initially meets Nell, Orlando is dressed in men's **clothing**, and Nell naturally assumes that Orlando is a man. When Nell believes Orlando to be a man, she is "appealing, hoping, trembling, [and] fearing," but when she realizes Orlando is a woman, she immediately begins to relax. Nell's difference in feelings underscores Woolf's underlying argument that gender is a social construct that is primarily reflected or perceived through clothing. "I'm by no means sorry to hear it," Nell says to Orlando upon discovering her gender. Nell isn't in the "mood" for men, she says, and claims to be "in the devil of a fix." This implies that, like Orlando, Nell is also attracted to women, but their relationship is not sexual. Instead, Nell and Orlando spend their time together talking. Nell reflects Orlando's taste for "low company," but their relationship also implies that the most meaningful relationships are often between those of the same sex, even those relationships that aren't sexual in nature.

Rustum el Sadi – One of the Romani people Orlando lives with

in Constantinople. The Romani people begin to suspect that Orlando isn't quite like them, and Rustum says it is because Orlando's "God is nature." Rustum and others in the community think nature is "cruel" and is no kind of god, but Orlando sees only nature's beauty. Indeed, Rustum and the Romani people respect nature, but they also acknowledge its destructive forces. Nature is, after all, more than just pretty sunsets; it is also bitter cold, harsh winds, and torrential rains. The Romani people also believe Orlando to be different because she puts too much stock in her ancestry and family history, which goes back nearly 500 years. Rustum's own family can trace its roots back to the building of the Pyramids, and he considers Orlando's family no more than a "vulgar upstart." Rustum and his community highlight Woolf's argument of the subjectivity of fact and truth. To Orlando, it is true, and no doubt a fact, that her family is both noble and old and nature is to be worshiped above all else, but Rustum and the Romani people's truth is something else entirely.

Grace Robinson – A servant employed by Orlando whom the narrator describes as a "Blackamoor," a derogatory term used around the 16th century to describe North Africans who were typically used by wealthy Europeans as slaves or (lowly) paid servants. The woman was given the name Grace Robinson to make "a Christian woman of her," which implies that Grace's identity as a North African means that white people see her as savage and exotic. This racist assumption is also reflected in the attic of Orlando's house as he swings his sword at the severed head of a Moor handing from the rafters. Grace Robinson, like Mrs. Grimsditch and Mr. Dupper, was an actual servant at Knole, the family estate of Vita Sackville-West, who serves as the inspiration for *Orlando*.

Lady R. – A London socialite whose reception room is "the antechamber to the presence room of genius." Only the greatest writers and intellectuals of the 18th century gather at Lady R.'s, and Orlando is ecstatic when she receives an invite to attend one such gathering. Lady R. is described as "the modern Sibyl," which is a reference to Sibyl Sophie Colefax (1874-1950), a real-life London socialite whom Woolf mentions in the preface of the novel. The novel refers to Lady R. like a prophetic figure, only she doesn't speak truth as expected. The genius of Lady R.'s reception room is but an "illusion," and Orlando is disappointed when not a single witty word is uttered there. Lady R.'s "illusion" of truth underscores truth's subjectivity, and even implies that truth is nonexistent; however, the absence of wit at Lady R.'s also implies that writers and poets are simply ordinary people, whose wit is found mainly in their published works. Otherwise, the intellectual elite are normal people who speak of banalities, like the weather and their gout.

Sir Thomas Browne – An English writer and learned man of a wide variety of sciences from the 17th century. Woolf first mentions Browne in the preface, and he is one of the writers she is "perpetually in debt of." Orlando, too, mentions Browne frequently, especially during his more depressed days spent in his family's crypt. Browne's work often involves the theme of death and burial, and this is reflected in Orlando's own obsession with death. The novel also draws a parallel between Orlando's own "melancholy," the four temperaments (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic) that match the four humors (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) that accounted for depression or moroseness in early medicine, and the melancholia of Browne's work, which he is famously known for.

Joseph Addison – An English essayist and poet of the 18th century. Addison is one of the poets Orlando idolizes (Nicolas Green later says that Orlando's poem, "**The Oak Tree**," reminds him of Addison's tragic play, *Cato*), and she meets him after befriending Alexander Pope. Like Pope and Swift, Orlando spends much time with Addison and even keeps a book in hand to write down all the witty things he says. But nothing witty is ever said and the book remains empty. The narrator quotes a passage from the *Spectator*, a daily publication put out by Addison from 1711 to 1712, and claims that Addison's "profundities" exist only in his work. Otherwise, he is just an ordinary man who likes "scented handkerchiefs" and wears "plum-coloured suits one day and grey another."

Euphrosyne – A noblewoman whom Orlando is engaged to marry early in the novel. Her real name is Lady Margaret, but Orlando refers to her only as Euphrosyne, a popular named used in Elizabethan poetry and the name Orlando uses for her in his sonnets. Euphrosyne is "fair, florid, and a trifle phlegmatic," and she loves **dogs**. Orlando begins to ignore Euphrosyne after he falls in love with Sasha, and by the time Sasha leaves him and returns to Russia, Orlando is a disgrace at Court, and his marriage to Euphrosyne is off. *Euphrosyne* is the name of a ship in Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, and it is the title of a book of poems written by Woolf's husband, Leonard Woolf, and several other members of the Bloomsbury Group, an elite group of writers, artists, and philosophers during the early 20th century, of which Woolf was a member as well. While *Orlando* is a fictionalized biography of Vita Sackville-West, much of Woolf's life and history is embedded in the novel as well, and Euphrosyne is evidence of such a connection. This personal connection to the novel underscores Woolf's central argument that remaining completely objective while writing a biography is impossible.

Sasha – A Muscovite Princess whom Orlando falls in love with during the Great Frost, at which time Orlando is betrothed to Euphrosyne. Orlando and Sasha spend much time together during the festival of the Great Frost, and they make love on the frozen River Thames. Orlando and Sasha plan to run away to Russia together, but Sasha never shows up on the night they are supposed to meet. She leaves Orlando alone in the rain, cursing women.

Penelope Hartopp – The daughter of a general who attends Orlando's lavish ball in Constantinople the night Orlando's patent of nobility arrives from England. Since most historical documents of the time have been destroyed in a fire, the book's fictional biographer uses Miss Hartopp's account to piece together the events of the evening. Miss Hartopp recounts a glorious party, and claims that her host, Orlando, stands *"at least"* six feet tall and has great legs. The narrator, of course, describes Orlando as having lovely legs, but never does the narrator mention him being of such height. Penelope Hartopp's recollection of Orlando's party underscores the unreliability of memory and the subjectivity of truth. Her recollection is undoubtedly an exaggeration, but as a part of the "official record," it is nevertheless accepted as truth. While Penelope likely believes her own memories and takes them for truth, they are not, strictly speaking, objectively true.

Queen Elizabeth I – Queen of England and Ireland from 1558 until her death in 1603. Queen Elizabeth falls in love with Orlando early in the novel, and she is enraged when she finds Orlando kissing another girl. It is implied that Orlando and the Queen have some sort of sexual relationship, and she is one of the many women Orlando is linked to throughout the novel. Ironically, Queen Elizabeth was celebrated in her time for her lifelong virginity, but the novel implies this isn't entirely accurate, which serves as another example of the subjectivity of fact and truth within the novel.

Mr. Dupper – The chaplain on Orlando's estate. Like Orlando and a handful of other characters, Mr. Dupper lives for hundreds of years in *Orlando*. He is in Orlando's employ during the 16th century, and he is the one who marries Orlando and Shel during the 19th century. Mr. Dupper is also, like Mrs. Grimsditch and Grace Robinson, based on an actual person employed at Knole, the family estate of Vita Sackville-West.

Mrs. Grimsditch – Orlando's housekeeper. Like Orlando, Mrs. Grimsditch lives for hundreds of years. She is employed by Orlando during the 16th century, and she is around when Orlando (now a woman) returns from Constantinople over a hundred years later. However, by the end of the novel, in 1928, Orlando has a new housekeeper whose name she can't readily remember. Mrs. Grimsditch is also, along with Grace Robinson and Mr. Dupper, based on an actual servant employed at Knole, the family estate of Vita Sackville-West, Woolf's inspiration for *Orlando*.

Lieutenant Brigge – An English naval officer. The narrator uses Brigge's personal diary to piece together the events of Orlando's party in Constantinople, after which Orlando inexplicably transforms into a woman. Brigge's diary entry tells of a large and lavish party, and he speaks of a popular rumor that claims "some kind of miracle" will be performed there. A miracle is never performed at the party, and the crowd begins to riot; however, the novel implies that the miracle occurs *after* the party, when Orlando changes gender. Diaries like Brigge's are of particular interest to modernist biographers; not only do diaries serve as official records of events, they also lend a bit of subjectivity to history, which *Orlando* argues is paramount in biographical writing.

Christopher Marlowe / Kit Marlowe – An English poet and playwright from the 16th century. Marlowe was Shakespeare's contemporary, and he is perhaps best known for his play, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*. In Nicholas Greene's harsh critique of Elizabethan poets, he claims that Shakespeare's scenes are stolen from Marlowe, who didn't live to see 30 and was "killed in a drunken brawl." Indeed, Marlowe was killed under rather mysterious circumstances. He was arrested in 1593 for vague charges of blasphemy, and just over a week later he was stabbed to death while drunk in a bar by an Englishman named Ingram Frizer. Like many of the other poets mentioned in *Orlando*, Woolf recognizes Marlowe's talent, but she also portrays him as a regular person, and a bit of a troublemaker, about whom there is nothing exceptional.

John Donne – An English poet who lived from 1572-1631. Donne is noted for his sonnets and elegies, and according to the harsh critique of Nicolas Greene during the Elizabethan age, Donne is a "mountebank" who wraps up "his lack of meaning in hard words." Woolf, too, appears to share this particular criticism, and she frequently pokes fun at Orlando's own use of complicated language in poetry. As Orlando grows as a writer, she begins to dislike poets that don't just say what they mean.

Sir Adrian Scrope – The British officer who delivers Orlando's patent of nobility. Historically speaking, Sir Adrian Scrope (1601-1660), was one of the 59 signatories who signed King Charles I's death warrant in 1649. Charles I was accused of being tyrannical and too Catholic by England's Parliament, and he was ultimately executed for high treason. The monarchy was abolished with Charles I's death; however, the monarchy was reinstated after the Restoration of 1660, and Sir Adrian Scrope was found guilty of regicide and was hanged, drawn, and quartered.

Rosina Pepita – A Romani dancer whom Orlando supposedly marries the night before he changes into a woman in Constantinople. Rosina never actually appears in the story and is only referred to, and she is another example of Orlando's taste for "low company." Orlando is said to have fathered three sons with Rosina, and they later sue Orlando for their father's estate (they claim that their father is dead, and Orlando's assets are rightfully theirs). After the courts declare Orlando officially a woman, the marriage to Rosina is annulled, and the children declared illegitimate.

Favilla – The daughter of a poor man from Somersetshire. Orlando dates Favilla, as he calls her "in his sonnets," early in the novel, and she is yet another example of Orlando's taste for "low company." Orlando stops seeing Favilla, however, after she

beats a **dog** for ripping her stocking. Orlando is "a passionate lover of animals," and when he sees Favilla treat a dog so badly, he suddenly notices how crooked her teeth are, which, Orlando says, "is a sure sign of a perverse and cruel disposition in woman."

Clorinda – A "sweet-mannered gentle lady" whom Orlando dates for nearly six months in the beginning of the novel. Her real name is never known, and Orlando refers to her only as Clorinda, a popular named used in Elizabethan poetry and the one Orlando uses for her in his sonnets. Clorinda, who is "much under the influence of the Priests," tries to "reform Orlando of his sins." Clorinda's attempts to reform Orlando "sicken" him," and he stops calling on her. Soon after, Clorinda contracts smallpox and dies.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Ben Jonson – An English poet and playwright of the early 17th century. Woolf frequently refers to Jonson and his writing both directly and indirectly in *Orlando*. He is a close friend to Nicolas Greene and one of the poets Orlando venerates.

John Dryden – A 17th-century English poet and Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom from 1668–1688. Woolf mentions Dryden several times throughout *Orlando*, and he is one of the famous poets Orlando admires.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

WRITING AND LITERATURE

Virginia Woolf was an important artistic contributor to the modernist movement of the 20th century, which sought to break from traditional forms of artistic expression. Modernists like Woolf believed that traditional forms of writing—be it poetry, prose, and even biography—were a poor fit for their new and changing world. The early 20th century saw sweeping changes politically, socially, and economically—and since the world was changing, modernists figured, so should art. Woolf's *Orlando* is one such attempt to critique antiquated literary traditions and produce more innovative work. Woolf's form is highly experimental, and she does not conform to any one single genre or category. While declaring itself a biography (narrated from the perspective of a fictional biographer), *Orlando* is also a biting critique of literature and writing. The subject, Orlando, is a poet, and the biographer repeatedly interrupts the novel to comment on their own writing. Throughout Orlando's unbelievable life, in which he changes gender after a curiously long sleep and lives over 400 years, Orlando encounters several past literary "giants," including William Shakespeare and Jonathan Swift. Woolf makes countless references to other literary works, and while she generally respects and pays homage to the past, she pokes fun at both herself and other writers. Through Woolf's meta commentary and her satirical depiction of writing and literature in *Orlando*, she effectively argues that there is a pressing need for new forms of literary expression.

While Orlando places famous poets on a pedestal throughout most of the novel, Woolf repeatedly knocks them down, which implies that these so-called literary "giants" aren't really that "great." Orlando passes a "rather fat, rather shabby man" writing at the servants' dinner table of his father's mansion and suspects the man is a poet. Woolf implies that the man is Shakespeare, but instead of portraying him in a flattering way, she presents him as an overweight man in a dirty **shirt**. Woolf does not deny Shakespeare's literary greatness—indeed, she references several of his plays throughout *Orlando*—but she does imply that in every other way, he is much like everyone else. After Orlando changes gender and becomes a woman, she asks Alexander Pope, a famous poet from the early 18th century, to go home with her. During the carriage ride, she mistakes a "hump in a cushion" for Pope's forehead in the darkness. In the light, Orlando realizes her mistake and sees Pope more clearly. "When one sees you plain, how ignoble, how despicable you are! Deformed and weakly, there is nothing to venerate in you, much to pity, most to despise." While these words are certainly harsh, Woolf's point is clear: Pope's physical appearance does not square with Orlando's expectations based on his poetry and reputation. There is nothing at all exceptional about Pope as a man, and Orlando later discovers that his poetry is flawed as well. The novel gives numerous other examples, and they each reflect the same general argument. Woolf implies that, aside from their works (which surely aren't perfect), there is nothing fundamentally different or special about the literary "greats." In this way, Woolf lifts the veil of the "illusion" of literature, making a departure from traditional forms of writing understandable, and perhaps even necessary.

Woolf also pokes fun at Nicholas Greene, a famous writer and critic, who is stubbornly resistant to change and whose opinions hypocritically change with the times, in order to critique those who oppose contemporary literature in favor of glorifying more traditional forms. When Orlando first meets Greene during the 16th century, Greene slams his fist on the table and proclaims, "the art of poetry is dead in England." Greene does not appreciate the new forms practiced by contemporary Elizabethan writers like Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe and prefers those from the classical age, which reflects a resistance to change and a reverence for

traditional forms. Orlando again meets Greene during the 19th century. "Ah! My dear lady," Greene says to Orlando, "the great days of literature are over. Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson—those were the giants. Dryden, Pope, Addison—those were the heroes." Of course, these are the very same poets Greene criticized so harshly during their own time, which again reflects an overall resistance to new literary forms and a reliance on the old, but it also suggests that literary criticism is hypocritical and essentially meaningless.

This resistance to new literary forms is also seen in Greene's criticism of Orlando's own work. When Greene reads Orlando's original play, *The Death of Hercules*, during the 16th century, he is exceedingly harsh and claims the play is "wordy and bombastic in the extreme." However, when Greene later reads Orlando's poem, "**The Oak Tree**," during the 19th century, Greene insists it must be published. "The Oak Tree" reminds him of poets like Addison, and, Greene says, "thankfully," it has "no trace" of "the modern spirit." Greene is accepting of Orlando's work only when it harkens to the form and "spirit" of past writers, not when it is original and experimental.

Orlando is deeply affected by Greene's poor review of his play, and he slips into an overwhelming depression that lasts for decades. Orlando finally snaps out of his despair when he decides to reject Greene's opinions. "Good, bad, or indifferent," Orlando says, "I'll write, from this day forward, to please myself." Later, as a woman in Victorian England, Orlando is happy that Greene approves of her poem, but his approval has much less influence on her. She questions why critics make writers feel that they "must always, always write like somebody else," and this appears to be Woolf's overarching point. After all, *Orlando* is nothing like the biographies—or novels, for that matter—that came before it, and it is through this "wordy and bombastic" book that Woolf suggests literature and writing, particularly the writing of biographies, is in need of reimagining for a new and changing age.

SUBJECTIVITY, TRUTH, AND BIOGRAPHY

In *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf implies that biographies of the past have failed to effectively capture a subject because they rely too heavily on what is perceived as objective fact. The book's subject, Orlando, is a fictional character based upon Woolf's real-life friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West, and Orlando's unbelievable life spans some 400 years. *Orlando* is also a history of English literature, and it was written specifically with Woolf's elite circle of friends (each of them writers and artists), known as the Bloomsbury Group, in mind. Woolf has an incredible connection to *Orlando*—personally, culturally, and artistically—which serves to underscore her opinion that remaining completely objective when writing a biography is impossible. Furthermore, Woolf suggests that collecting and recording facts, such as is done in the writing of biographies, is difficult because to do so relies (at least in part) on another person's memories, which are highly fragmented and specific to each individual. Thus, with the surreal biography, *Orlando*, narrated by a fictional biographer, Woolf at once argues the unreliability of memory, while claiming simultaneously that time and truth are ultimately subjective. A biography should, instead, capture the overall essence of its subject rather than attempt to make a strict account of specific events.

Woolf repeatedly draws attention to time's subjectivity in *Orlando*, which, she asserts, makes the biographer's job difficult. The narrator notes that Time (with a capital "T") makes "animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality," but it "has no such simple effect upon the mind." An hour, the narrator says, "may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length"; or, "an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second." The perception of time, then, is decidedly individual and circumstantial, not universal. Traditional biographies rely on a universal understanding of time, but the passing of time in *Orlando* is nearly imperceptible and would appear absent all together if not for the narrator's mention of it. "Time passes" specifically as Orlando perceives it, not based on the clock. The narrator claims "the task of estimating the length of human life (of the animals' we presume not to speak) is beyond our capacity." Furthermore, "it would be no exaggeration to say" that Orlando can go "out after breakfast a man of thirty and come home to dinner a man of fifty-five at least." Time, especially that of years, is incredibly subjective in *Orlando*. Individual moments have far more influence on Orlando than decades or even centuries, and as such, the novel often belabors a single minute but glosses over a hundred years. The narrator contends that "the true length of a person's life […] is always a matter of some dispute. Indeed, it is a difficult business—this time keeping." By the end of the biography, Orlando has lived over 400 years; however, Woolf does not mean to imply that people are capable of such longevity. Her point, on the contrary, is that Orlando is ultimately a mixture of everyone and everything that has come before her, such as her ancestors and the literature of the past. To adequately capture Orlando's life, Woolf therefore argues, it is necessary to capture *all* that Orlando considers her life to be.

Woolf also interrogates truth in *Orlando*, which she does by way of Orlando's search for truth through various means. However, Orlando ultimately learns that truth, like time, isn't so concrete. Orlando chiefly looks for truth in poetry but is "despaired of being able to solve the problem of what poetry is and what truth is," and falls "into a deep dejection." Truth, it seems, can't be found. Like time, Truth in *Orlando* is not universal, and it is not something that can be pointed to and written down, such as in a traditional biography or historical account. Truth is elusive and frequently changes, much like Woolf's unconventional writing style. Orlando's search for truth continues in the drawing room of Lady R., where the

brightest and most famous writers and minds of the age gather. Lady R.'s intellectual gatherings have the reputation of hosting "genius," and Orlando hopes to discover truth and "profundities." But nothing profound is ever said and Orlando leaves bored. Truth, in this case, is an "illusion," and at times "does not exist" at all. As such, factual truth is sparse in *Orlando*, and Woolf instead relies on Orlando's personal truth, which, she argues, more adequately captures the essence of Orlando's life. The most prominent, and perhaps most puzzling, moment of truth within *Orlando* is the point in which Orlando first wakes having transformed from a man into a woman. "THE TRUTH!" the narrator declares in capital letters. "Truth! Truth! Truth!" the narrator repeats. "[Orlando] is a woman." Many in the novel set out to prove that Orlando was a woman all along, or that she is indeed not a woman now, but the fact remains that Orlando had been a man and is now a woman. Actual truth, Woolf implies, is often unbelievable and not accepted across the board.

In addition to the complications of time and truth, the book also contends with Orlando's Memory (with a capital "M"), which the narrator claims is the "seamstress, and a capricious one at that," of Orlando's life. "Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither," the narrator explains. The scattered and random nature of Orlando's memory is reflected in Woolf's stream-of-consciousness style of writing, and, like truth, it can be difficult to pin down. The aim of biography—to capture the life and essence of a person—is nearly impossible, Woolf implies, at least in the way biographies have traditionally been written. Thus, Woolf offers a completely new type of biography—one that relies on subjectivity rather than fact.

GENDER AND SOCIETY

In one of the more surprising moments of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Orlando wakes after an inexplicable coma-like sleep of seven days to find himself transformed into a woman. Orlando is the fictional representation of Woolf's own friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West, and Orlando's seemingly easy transition from male to female reflects Woolf and, presumably, Sackville-West's, own understanding of gender. Both Woolf and Sackville-West were members of the Bloomsbury Group, an elite group of writers and artists who questioned and openly resisted traditional assumptions of gender and sexuality. Orlando—or Vita, for all intents and purposes—possesses both male and female qualities and has affairs with both men and women, completely disrupting popular gender stereotypes along the way. People are perceived differently in *Orlando*, and, Woolf implies, in broader society as well, based on what gender they are; however, many of the characters in the novel are androgynous and their receptions change with their assumed genders. Through this rather fluid depiction of gender in *Orlando*, Woolf implies that the dichotomous male-versus-female understanding of gender is merely a social construction, and that no one person is wholly one gender or the other.

One of the ways in which gender is constructed in *Orlando* is through **clothing**. Clothes "change our view of the world and the world's view of us," declares the fictional biographer who narrates the book, and that is certainly the case for Orlando. When Orlando first sees Sasha, his great love of the 16th century, ice skating during the Great Frost, her "Russian fashion serve to disguise the sex," and Orlando is convinced that Sasha is a man. But as Sasha skates closer and Orlando can make out the shape of her breasts under her masculine tunic, he knows she is a woman. Orlando is only "curious" about Sasha when he thinks she's a man, but when he finds out she's a woman, he falls madly in love with her. This suggests that people's view of others, particularly on a romantic or sexual level, are deeply influenced by the social norms of how men and women are expected to present themselves. The narrator mentions that Orlando's legs, which remain completely unchanged from male to female, are one of her best assets. A sailor catches a glimpse of Orlando's calf and starts "so violently" that he misses his footing and only saves "himself by the skin of his teeth." Orlando's legs haven't changed since she was a man, but the sight of them in a dress distracts the sailor so badly, he nearly trips and falls. This implies it is Orlando's clothes, not specifically her body, that reflects her gender, and it is largely her clothes that make her attractive to the opposite sex. As a woman, Orlando dresses up as a man and visits a prostitute named Nell. Nell assumes that Orlando is a man because of the way she dresses, and it is not until Orlando reveals herself as a woman that Nell begins to relax. "I'm by no means sorry to hear it," Nell says of Orlando's revelation, "I'm not in the mood for the society of the other sex to-night. Indeed, I'm in the devil of a fix." Nell accepts Orlando and acts differently based on what gender she believes Orlando to be based on her clothing, which again implies that one's understanding of gender is highly dependent upon social norms.

After Orlando becomes a woman, she understands that society expects her to "be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely appareled." The only problem, Orlando maintains, is that women are none of those things naturally, and Woolf uses Orlando's transition to show how these expectations are artificial and socially constructed. Hairdressing alone takes up an hour of Orlando's mornings as a woman, then "there's looking in the looking-glass, another hour; there's changing from silk to lace and from lace to paduasoy; and there's being chaste year in year out." The expectations and restrictions placed on women are ridiculous, Woolf implies, and are entirely manmade. "A pox on them!" Orlando says in response to society's expectations of her as a woman, suddenly "realizing for the first time, what, in other circumstances, she would have been taught as a child, that is to say, the sacred responsibilities

of womanhood." To Orlando—and, by extension, Woolf—"the sacred responsibilities of womanhood" amount to a nuisance, "a pox," or, more precisely, a disease, which only serves to hinder women and hold them to impossible standards. In Orlando's experience, being a woman "meant conventionality, meant slavery, meant deceit, meant denying her love, fettering her limbs, pursing her lips, and restraining her tongue"—all things she is not expected to do as a man. Orlando's profound change places her, and Woolf, in a unique position to critique the existence of men and women respectively in English society, and her conclusion is that women are, in many ways, objectified and marginalized on account of their gender.

While being a woman is obviously different for Orlando compared to living as a man, the novel maintains that the sexes "intermix." "In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place," the novel argues, "and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what is above." Thus, the traditional notions of male and female are invented and imposed by society and do little more than confuse and obscure one's true gender identity. "Whether, then, Orlando was most man or woman," the narrator writes, "it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided."

IDENTITY AND TRANSFORMATION

Orlando, the protagonist and title character of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, undergoes profound personal and physical changes in the novel, and he lives in a world that likewise drastically transforms. When the narrator first introduces Orlando, he is a young boy of 16 in Elizabeth I's court, sometime around the mid-1670s. By the end of the novel, however, Orlando is a 36-year-old woman who gets out of her car on "the twelfth stroke of midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-eight." Orlando lives through incredible changes of time and place, and even mysteriously changes gender. "What the future might bring," the narrator declares, "Heaven only knew. Change was incessant, and change perhaps would never cease." Despite the changes in both Orlando and the world, however, the person Orlando is deep down remains consistent. He begins the novel as a poet who deeply loves nature and women, and that is exactly who Orlando is at the close of the novel as well. In this vein, Woolf effectively argues that regardless of social changes and personal transformations, who one is—that is to say, one's identity—remains the same.

Orlando experiences many transformations during the novel; however, with each change, Orlando remains the same person. This steadiness of Orlando's identity underscores Woolf's argument that people don't really change. After Orlando is rejected by Sasha, his love of the 16th century, he falls into a deep "trancelike" sleep for a week, and upon waking, "some change" is perceived to "have taken place in the chambers of his brain." Orlando appears "to have an imperfect recollection of his past life," especially of Sasha, but he still escapes into writing and poetry, a constant love in his life. Orlando's major transformation is when he changes from a man into a woman. Despite this radical physical change, "in every other respect," the narrator asserts, "Orlando remains precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity." In other words, man or woman, Orlando is essentially the same person. Of all Orlando's changes, it is perhaps most difficult for her to grasp the expected change from loving women to loving men: "And as all Orlando's loves had been women, now, […] though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved." Orlando's sexuality cuts to the deepest part of her identity and does not change along with the physical, surface changes of her body.

Woolf also underscores the transformation of England through the centuries. The alteration in London society is nearly as drastic as the changes in Orlando herself, but even through sweeping changes in society, Orlando remains essentially the same person, again reflecting a consistency of identity. By the time the Victorian era begins, the narrator notes the "constitution of England" is "stealthily, and imperceptibly" "altered." While this transformation is evident "in every part of England," the narrator claims that Orlando prefers to "pretend that the climate is the same." Despite the drastic changes in society, Orlando hasn't changed a bit, and even goes so far as to deny the obvious changes that have taken place. Again, during the Victorian era, Orlando forgets "that ladies are not supposed to walk in public places alone," and she is accosted by a crowd of people. Society's gender expectations have greatly changed from the 18th to the 19th century, but Orlando operates much in the same way she always has. During the 19th and 20th centuries, English society is greatly transformed and modernized, but when Orlando decides to go into London, she yells to her servant to ready her carriage. The servant, a bit confused, says that Orlando still has time "to catch the eleven forty-five." Despite living through inventions such as the steam engine, electricity, the automobile, and the elevator, Orlando is slow to adapt to her surroundings, again suggesting that people don't really change much, if at all.

Despite all the changes Orlando endures, she realizes toward the end of the novel that she remains "fundamentally the same." After over 400 years and transforming from a man into a woman, Orlando has "the same brooding meditative temper, the same love of animals and nature, the same passion for the country and the seasons." Orlando's identity, who she is deep down—her sexuality, her respect for nature, and her dedication to poetry—remains with her through it all. While much of Orlando's life relies on the limitations and expectations of an ever-changing society, her identity remains uniquely her own, untouched, and uninfluenced, by external factors.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CLOTHING

Clothing symbolizes the artificiality of gender as a social construction in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, and it often serves to obscure one's true gender identity, which the novel suggests naturally vacillates between both male and female. Orlando's gender identity, both as a man and as a woman, is communicated and represented through clothing. After Orlando transforms from a man into a woman, the narrator is careful to note that nothing else much changes in Orlando's appearance. "Their faces remained, as their portraits prove," the narrator says, "practically the same." When Orlando wears trousers, he is perceived by others as a man. Conversely, when Orlando wears a dress, she is perceived by others as woman. Thus, the novel suggests, it is Orlando's clothes, not Orlando's body, that dictates Orlando's gender.

The same is true for other characters in the novel who find themselves pigeonholed into certain gender identities based on which gender their clothes suggest they are. For instance, when Orlando first sees Sasha skating on the ice during the Great Frost, her masculine Russian clothes make Orlando believe she is a man; and when the Archduke Harry puts on a dress and disguises himself as the Archduchess Harriet, Orlando believes he is a woman even though he is rightly a man. The narrator even points out how the popular style of dress during the 16th century, which is quite elaborate and feminine even for the men's fashions, obscures Orlando's then-male gender. "Clothes are but a symbol of something hidden deep beneath," the narrator argues. The novel posits that everyone has both male and female qualities and that no one is wholly one gender or the other—after all, "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."

"THE OAK TREE" AND THE OAK TREE

"The Oak Tree" is the poem that Orlando writes for nearly 300 years in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, and it represents Orlando's identity as poet and his—later, her—growth as a writer and a person throughout the novel. The narrator first mentions "The Oak Tree" in the second chapter, which is set some time during the 17th century; however, Orlando refers to the poem as his "boyish dream," which implies it has been around for much longer. After Nicholas Greene gives one of Orlando's original plays a poor review, Orlando burns all his work but retains "The Oak Tree," claiming it is "very short." Orlando can't bring himself to burn "The Oak Tree" because it is central to his identity as a poet. It also is different from Orlando's other works, which are long and pretentious.

Throughout Orlando's nearly 400-year life, "The Oak Tree" goes through many revisions and rewrites. The first date written on the poem is 1586, and by the time Orlando places her poem under the oak tree on her family's estate in 1928, it hardly resembles the poem it began as. Over the years, "The Oak Tree" goes from "gloomy" and "in love with death" to "sprightly and satirical," and Orlando's style changes from poetry to prose, then to drama and back again to poetry. Orlando, too, changes with her poem, but through all these changes, Orlando remains "fundamentally the same." She remains a poet, and the constant presence of "The Oak Tree" throughout the book and throughout Orlando's long life is evidence of this. This consistency is reflected in the physical representation of the oak tree, which connotes sturdiness, strength, and longevity. Orlando recalls seeing the tree for the first time 1588, just after beginning her lifelong poem, and the two are intimately linked in Orlando's mind. By placing the poem at the base of the oak tree at the end of the novel, Orlando returns her work to nature, her ultimate inspiration.

DOGS

Virginia Woolf mentions dogs repeatedly throughout *Orlando*, and they are symbolic of Orlando's deep connection to nature within the novel. Orlando's connection to nature is central to his—later, her—identity, and this connection is reflected in his love of "beasts," or dogs. Orlando is never without a dog for the entirety of the novel, and he judges other people based on how they treat dogs. For example, after Favilla beats a spaniel for ripping a hole in her stocking, Orlando considers her a "perverse and cruel" woman. On the other, Orlando is willing to forgive Euphrosyne's introverted and cold personality in large part because she is "never without a whippet or spaniel at her knee" and feeds them from her dinner plate. Orlando's connection to dogs is so strong that his Seleuchi hound never leaves his side during the week-long sleep that transforms Orlando into a woman, and when Orlando finally wakes up, the dog is "half famished with hunger."

In Orlando's experience, people are mostly a disappointment, and after Nicholas Greene gives one of Orlando's original plays a bad review, Orlando sends his servant to fetch him two of the best elk hounds from Norway. "For," Orlando says, "I have done with men." Orlando is repeatedly disappointed by others, and there remains but two things in which he puts his trust: "dogs and nature; an elk-hound and a rose bush." Dogs remain an integral part of Orlando's life for hundreds of years. Even as Orlando walks down to the **oak tree** at the end of the novel to bury her poem, thus repaying her debt to nature, she takes her

dogs with her.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Mariner Books edition of *Orlando* published in 1973.

Chapter 1 Quotes

But there, sitting at the servants' dinner table with a tankard beside him and paper in front of him, sat a rather fat, rather shabby man, whose ruff was a thought dirty, and whose clothes were of hodden brown. He held a pen in his hand, but he was not writing. He seemed in the act of rolling some thought up and down, to and fro in his mind till it gathered shape or momentum to his liking. His eyes, globed and clouded like some green stone of curious texture, were fixed. He did not see Orlando. For all his hurry, Orlando stopped dead. Was this a poet? Was he writing poetry? "Tell me," he wanted to say, "everything in the whole world"—for he had the wildest, most absurd, extravagant ideas about poets and poetry—but how speak to a man who does not see you ? who sees ogres, satyrs, perhaps the depths of the sea instead?

Related Characters: The Shabby Man / William Shakespeare, Orlando

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21-22

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs early in the novel when Orlando is rushing to meet the Queen, and it is significant because it underscores Orlando's admiration of famous poets and his belief that poets have the inside track to truth. This quote also highlights Woolf's central argument that poets, while undoubtedly talented, are simply ordinary people who aren't worthy of quite so much praise and worship. The novel later implies that the man sitting at the servants' table is William Shakespeare, and he is the epitome of an accomplished poet in Orlando's view. Yet Shakespeare's appearance does not reflect the expectation of a famous and accomplished poet. Shakespeare sits at the "servants' dinner table," which implies he doesn't rate a seat in the main dining room, and his clothes are drab, worn, and dirty. He is even a bit overweight and, Woolf thus implies, merely a regular person.

Orlando's desire to ask the strange man, whom Orlando suspects is a poet, to tell him "everything in the whole world," reflects Orlando's initial belief that poets know all of life's secrets and meanings. Orlando has the "wildest, most absurd, extravagant ideas about poets and poetry," which is to say he believes poets are privy to profound truths. Orlando, however, later learns that truth is often an illusion and all the profound truths poets are privy to are already in their published works. Orlando longs to be a famous poet like Shakespeare for most of the novel, but Woolf suggests that fame is unnecessary and even meaningless. Shakespeare *is* famous, yet Orlando has no idea who he is, and it has no bearing whatsoever on the poetry he writes.

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.

Related Characters: Sasha, Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Orlando sees Sasha for the first time, skating on the frozen River Thames during the Great Frost. This moment speaks to Woolf's overreaching argument that gender is a social construction. Orlando believes Sasha to be a man because, in addition to her traditional Russian clothing that is quite masculine, Orlando considers her too strong to be a woman. Orlando perceives Sasha as he would a man, suggesting that how one views another is deeply rooted in the social norms of how one is expected to behave and dress as a man or woman. Orlando believes that Sasha must be a man because she skates "with such speed and vigour." Society expects women to be weak and refined, not strong and fast, and Orlando assigns Sasha's gender based on this misconception.

Despite his belief that Sasha is man, Orlando is still attracted to her; however, society does not tolerate same-sex relationships and "all embraces" are "out of the question." Orlando is so frustrated with society's restrictions of love that he wants to rip his hair from his head, and this frustration is seen later in novel as well. As a woman, Orlando must again deny her attraction, this time to women, and is forced to conform to society's idea of heterosexual love and marriage. Orlando's plight reflects

Woolf's own frustrations with the social condemnation of same-sex relationships in the early 20th century. Woolf did not hold traditional views of love being between those of the opposite sex only, and *Orlando*, a love letter of sorts to Woolf's friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West, is evidence of this.

❝ Then, suddenly Orlando would fall into one of his moods of melancholy; the sight of the old woman hobbling over the ice might be the cause of it, or nothing; and would fling himself face downwards on the ice and look into the frozen waters and think of death. For the philosopher is right who says that nothing thicker than a knife's blade separates happiness from melancholy; and he goes on to opine that one is twin fellow to the other; and draws from this the conclusion that all extremes of feeling are allied to madness; and so bids us take refuge in the true Church (in his view the Anabaptist) which is the only harbour, port, anchorage, etc., he said, for those tossed on this sea.

Related Characters: Sir Thomas Browne, Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45-46

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs during Orlando's relationship with Sasha, in which he falls inexplicably into a deep depression, which the narrator later claims is a direct result of Orlando's identity as a poet. Throughout the novel, Orlando falls into many "moods of melancholy," of which there is, at times, no precursor or perceptible cause. Woolf, too, struggled with depression and melancholy for much of her life. She was hospitalized for prolonged periods of time for what she and her family described as her "madness," and she twice attempted suicide before finally succeeding with her third attempt at the age of 59. *Orlando* may be a fictionalized biography of Vita Sackville-West, but it also reflects many aspects of Woolf's own life, which harkens to Woolf's argument that remaining completely objective in the writing of biography is impossible.

The word "melancholy" is used several times throughout the novel to describe Orlando's depression, and Woolf draws a parallel between melancholy—the temperament thought in early medicine to be caused by too much black bile in blood—and the writings of Sir Thomas Browne. Woolf first mentions Browne in the preface, and the narrator also references him multiple times, often during Orlando's bouts of depression. Browne's writing greatly reflects his own depression, or melancholy, and the narrator further claims that all writers, especially poets, have "too much of that black humour." Here, Orlando tries to escape his "madness" though religion, but Woolf, using the narrator as a mouthpiece, sarcastically implies that religion is no cure for this poet's disease. Orlando ultimately learns that poetry, while certainly the cause, is also the cure for what ails him. However, as Woolf's own tragic history suggests, this cure is limited as well.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ The biographer is now faced with a difficulty which it is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over. Up to this point in telling the story of Orlando's life, documents, both private and historical, have made it possible to fulfil the first duty of a biographer, which is to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth; unenticed by flowers; regardless of shade; on and on methodically till we fall plump into the grave and write *finis* on the tombstone above our heads. But now we come to an episode which lies right across our path, so that there is no ignoring it. Yet it is dark, mysterious, and undocumented; so that there is no explaining it. Volumes might be written in interpretation of it; whole religious systems founded upon the signification of it. Our simple duty is to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may.

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs right before Orlando falls into one his week-long transformative sleeps (which is only one of many unbelievable events in Orlando's life), and the novel prefaces this unbelievable event with this passage, which serves as a sort of explanation for what she is about to report. This short metacognitive aside is significant because it lends insight into Woolf's opinion of traditional biography and her central argument that fact is ultimately subjective. Traditional biographies focus on what is considered objective fact, like the length of one's life, their gender, or known achievements. The subjective aspects of one's life, however, the parts that are "dark, mysterious, and undocumented," are "glossed over" or completely omitted in traditional biographies.

This passage suggests that a true biography must focus on

subjective fact as well as objective fact if it is to accurately capture a subject's essence. Orlando's life may be unbelievable to some, but it is nevertheless Orlando's subjective reality, and it is just as important in the telling of Orlando's life as any objective fact. The narrator argues that one's life does not necessarily end at their "tombstone," and it doesn't necessarily begin with birth either. Of course, this does not mean that Orlando, and by extension Sackville-West, actually lives for 400 years or sleeps for days a time as if dead. On the contrary, what the book implies is that Orlando's life, which is steeped in literature and aristocratic history, *seems to Orlando* to be nearly 400 years, sprinkled with occasional periods of brief death. Orlando's subjective reality is indeed a fact to Orlando, and the narrator considers it their "duty" as a biographer to report these facts "as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may."

> But if sleep it was, of what nature, we can scarcely refrain from asking, are such sleeps as these? Are they remedial measures—trances in which the most galling memories, events that seem likely to cripple life for ever, are brushed with a dark wing which rubs their harshness off and gilds them, even the ugliest, and basest, with a lustre, an incandescence? Has the finger of death to be laid on the tumult of life from time to time lest it rend us asunder? Are we so made that we have to take death in small doses daily or we could not go on with the business of living? And then what strange powers are these that penetrate our most secret ways and change our most treasured possessions without our willing it? Had Orlando, worn out by the extremity of his suffering, died for a week, and then come to life again? And if so, of what nature is death and of what nature life? Having waited well over half an hour for an answer to these questions, and none coming, let us get on with the story.

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67-68

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Orlando wakes from his first transformative week-long sleep, and it is significant because it explains Orlando's tendency to fall asleep for several days with no signs of life, only to wake transformed in some way. To say that the narrator explains Orlando's coma-like sleeps isn't to say she offers an absolute definition of what they are. On the contrary, the narrator's explanation is itself riddled with question marks. The narrator questions if Orlando's sleep is a "remedial measure," something curative or corrective that allows him to go on living despite his deep emotional pain and despair. The narrator also likens Orlando's sleep to death and implies that "small doses" of death are necessary to continue living.

But even if the book were to give an exact reason for Orlando's sleep, like he died and came back to life, it would have very little meaning without knowing the nature of life and death. *Orlando* is rife with deep philosophical questions such as this, and here, Orlando waits for an answer for "well over half an hour." While this is obviously sarcasm, the novel nevertheless takes such questions seriously. The narrator doesn't have a concrete explanation for Orlando's transformations, just as the narrator never offers a concrete explanation for life and death, but the narrator draws a parallel between both life and death and Orlando's transformations. Orlando's transformative sleeps coincide with a change to Orlando's "most treasured possessions," be that his memories or other aspects of his identity, such as gender. As Orlando changes from one person to another, which novel argues everyone does throughout life, his transformative sleeps metaphorically represent the death of some part of his identity or self.

> For once the disease of reading has laid hold upon the system it weakens it so that it falls an easy prey to that other scourge which dwells in the ink pot and festers in the quill. The wretch takes to writing. [...] The flavour of it all goes out of him; he is riddled by hot irons; gnawed by vermin. He would give every penny he has (such is the malignity of the germ) to write one little book and become famous; yet all the gold in Peru will not buy him the treasure of a well-turned line. So he falls into consumption and sickness, blows his brains out, turns his face to the wall. It matters not in what attitude they find him. He has passed through the gates of Death and known the flames of Hell.

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the narrator is explaining the correlation between the "disease" of reading, which causes one to "substitute phantom for reality," and the "disease" of writing. This

passage reflects Woolf's argument that fame is irrelevant to writing and poetry, and it also underscores the mental anguish Woolf claims often goes along with writing. Being a poet is central to Orlando's identity, and it remains a part of him throughout the entire novel despite profound changes otherwise; however, Orlando's identity as a poet is the cause of significant pain in his life. At times, the act of writing is excruciating for Orlando, and he indeed feels as if he is "riddled by hot irons" and "gnawed by vermin." But Orlando is a poet, so he continues to put pen to paper.

Orlando closely associates being a poet with fame, and he wants to be famous so badly that he would give his entire fortune to just to publish "one little book." Orlando believes that to be a real poet he must also be famous, and Woolf implies that since this is "the malignity of the germ," that everyone struck by this "disease" of writing feels much the same way. To write, the novel therefore implies, often comes with the desire for publication and fame, but she reminds the reader that money and fame cannot buy Orlando "the treasure of a well-tuned line." In this way, Woolf argues that fame and commercial success are not necessary for one to be a "real poet." Orlando is a real poet because, through writing, "he has passed through the gate of Death and known the flames of Hell," and that has nothing to do with fame.

❝ Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite, and stuffed them into a case, often of the most incongruous, for the poet has a butcher's face and the butcher a poet's; nature, who delights in muddle and mystery, so that even now (the first of November, 1927) we know not why we go upstairs, or why we come down again, our most daily movements are like the passage of a ship on an unknown sea, and the sailors at the masthead ask, pointing their glasses to the horizon: Is there land or is there none? to which, if we are prophets, we make answer "Yes" ; if we are truthful we say "No" ; nature, who has so much to answer for besides the perhaps unwieldy length of this sentence, has further complicated her task and added to our confusion by providing not only a perfect rag-bag of odds and ends within us—a piece of a policeman's trousers lying cheek by jowl with Queen Alexandra's wedding veil—but has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lightly stitched together by a single thread.

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77-78

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as the narrator is explaining Orlando and her job as his biographer, and it is significant because it underscores Woolf's desire to write an entirely new type of biography that relies on subjective reality rather than objective fact. The narrator's language here, that nature has made people "unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite, and stuffed them into a case," harkens to Woolf's 1927 essay, "The New Biography." Woolf's essay claims a biography must combine both objective fact (the "granite-like solidity" of truth) and subjective fact (the "rainbow-like intangibility" of personality) to capture a subject's true essence. The echoing of this language in this quote reflects Woolf's central argument that the literary canon is indeed in need of a new biography to do just that.

The narrator says that Orlando, and everyone else for that matter, is "unequally" made of "granite" and "rainbows," and the narrator implies that there is more "rainbow-like intangibility" than "granite-like solidarity." In other words, the novel argues that one's subjective reality is more important than objective facts when writing a biography, and this opinion is reflected in the stream of consciousness style of writing this quote takes on. The narrator's thoughts move quickly, jumping back and forth in time, and often don't seem to make much sense. The narrator suggests this randomness is the nature of the human mind and that "the whole assortment" is "lightly stitched together by a single thread." In this way, one's life is made up mostly of subjective thoughts and memories that are often random and arbitrary, and, the book therefore implies, this "perfect rag-bag of odds and ends" must also be represented in biographical writing.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ 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, 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. Some slight haziness there may have been, as if a few dark drops had fallen into the clear pool of memory; certain things had become a little dimmed; but that was all. The change seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at it.

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 138-139

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Orlando has just transformed inexplicably from a man into a woman,. This passage reflects Woolf's primary argument that regardless of change and personal transformation, who one truly is—their core identity—remains the same. Furthermore, this quote also highlights Woolf's assertion that traditional notions of gender are social constructs. Orlando has profoundly changed, and it is surely impossible to say she is the exact same person as before; however, she isn't all that different either. The narrator admits Orlando's future will now be "altered" and, for example, Orlando will be expected to be dependent upon men instead of being depended upon by women. These differences, however, are merely reflections of society's false gender assumptions and do "nothing whatever to alter" who Orlando is.

As a woman, Orlando looks the same as she did when she was a man, and she is as beautiful as she was handsome. The narrator claims Orlando's pronouns must change from "he" and "his" to "she" and "hers" for "conventions sake," but all of Orlando's memories and experiences as a man remain intact. In fact, Orlando views her transformation as such an insignificant change that it seems to her "painless" and unsurprising. In this way, Woolf implies that gender, as it is traditionally understood in society, is artificial and constructed, and it is not at all important to Orlando. Gender basically amounts to "convention" in *Orlando*, like which pronouns to use and what clothing to wear, but it doesn't cut to the center of who Orlando is. Who Orlando is, her true identity, or real self, is consistent despite her fluctuating gender.

> What was to be done, Orlando could not think. To leave the gipsies and become once more an Ambassador seemed to her intolerable. But it was equally impossible to remain for ever where there was neither ink nor writing paper, neither reverence for the Talbots, nor respect for a multiplicity of bedrooms. So she was thinking, one fine morning on the slopes of Mount Athos, when minding her goats. And then Nature, in whom she trusted, either played her a trick or worked a miracle—again, opinions differ too much for it to be possible to say which.

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149-150

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Orlando struggles with the decision to either stay with the Romani people—referred to with the word "gipsies" throughout the novel, which is now considered a racial slur—or return to mainstream society, and it is important because it underscores Orlando's identity as a writer, but it also sheds light on Orlando's pride in her noble family and aristocratic heritage. Orlando despises the confines and restrictions of mainstream society and loves the freedom Romani life affords her; however, Orlando's identity as a poet means she can't live without paper and ink, so she must return to society for that alone, if anything at all. Orlando finds returning to her former life as an Ambassador "intolerable," but the society that makes her life so unbearable is also what imbues her aristocratic heritage and noble ancestry with importance, and this quote draw attention to this fact.

A large part of Orlando's identity is her role as a poet, but a big part of Orlando's identity is rooted in her noble heritage as well, and that means nothing to the Romani people. They don't have "reverence for the Talbots," an early English family thought to have begun with Sir John Talbot, 1st Earl of Shrewsbury, who was born in the late 14th century, and they aren't impressed by Orlando's sprawling family estate and her "multiplicity of bedrooms" either. This passage alludes to the strange mirage Orlando sees form in the distance of her family's estate, after which she knows she must return to London. She is convinced she must go because her mansion, and therefore her aristocratic heritage, has appeared before her, yet she isn't sure if "Nature" has "played her a trick or worked a miracle." In this way, Woolf implies that Orlando realizes her pride and reverence in her aristocratic heritage is completely subjective and therefore arbitrary. Nevertheless, it is who Orlando is and still important, even if the Romani people disagree.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ With some of the guineas left from the sale of the tenth pearl of her string, Orlando had bought herself a complete outfit of such clothes as women then wore, and it was in the dress of a young Englishwoman of rank that she now sat on the deck of the *Enamoured Lady*. 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; and the gipsy women, except in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the gipsy men. At any rate, 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 the privileges of her position. But that start was not of the kind that might have been expected.

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Orlando has put on a dress for the first time, a moment that points to Woolf's argument that gender is a social construction based almost entirely on clothing. Orlando has been living as a woman for quite some time with the Romani people, yet it isn't until she puts on a dress in mainstream society that she suddenly notices the differences between living as a man and living as a woman. In the more androgynous "Turkish trousers" Orlando wore with the Romani people, she was hardly aware of her change of gender, and male and female Romani people only differ "in one or two important particulars." But aboard a ship named the *Enamoured Lady*, it is obvious that gender is a central part of English society.

With the elaborate "coil of skirts" women are expected to wear at the time, attention is clearly drawn to Orlando's gender. One skirt isn't enough, and Orlando must wear layers of crinoline, petticoats, and skirts to fit the era's rigid expectations of a proper lady's dress. The Captain pays Orlando excessive and unsolicited attention aboard the ship, but not until after Orlando feels "the coil of skirts about her legs," which implies he acts this way precisely because Orlando is a woman. This again suggests that how people view others, especially on a sexual level, are deeply influenced by social norms and expectations, such as clothing. It is Orlando's clothing, not Orlando specifically, that signals her gender to the Captain. Orlando looks the same as she always has, except for her skirts, and she never receives such treatment as a man. Woolf implies, then, that the dichotomous male-versus-female understanding of gender is artificial and based largely on one's clothing.

❝ "And that's the last oath I shall ever be able to swear," she thought; "once I set foot on English soil. 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 rim him through the body, or sit among my peers, or 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?"

Related Characters: Orlando (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157-158

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Orlando realizes that the sight of her legs can make men behave in ridiculous ways, and she vows to keep them covered. This moment underscores the blatant sexism present in English society. Orlando's transformation from a man into a woman puts both Orlando and the novel as a whole in a unique position to critique the role of men and women respectively in English society, and Orlando ultimately discovers that women are marginalized and disregarded because of their sex. In addition to never again revealing her legs in public, the narrator offers a laundry list of things Orlando will no longer be able to do as a woman, and her list puts the sexism of English society into rather harsh perspective.

The narrator's list is obviously sarcastic, but the point is clear enough: Orlando cannot do the same things she did as a man now that she is woman. As a woman, Orlando cannot challenge a man to fight or accuse him of dishonesty, nor can she fight a duel or run for public office. She can't be awarded a royal title, sit as a judge over a criminal, or fight and die for her country. In short, all Orlando will be able to do now that she is a woman is wait on men and pour their tea. This rather stark view of Orlando's life as a woman compared to her life as a man thrusts the sexism of society into plain sight and argues the profound injustice of such

bias. As a woman, Orlando remains perfectly capable of doing everything she did as a man, the only difference is society has falsely decided she is no longer qualified.

> 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.

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the narrator is explaining that even though Orlando is now a woman, she is still attracted to women, a moment that reflects Woolf's argument that successful and meaningful relationships are often between those of the same sex. Orlando knows that society expects her to love men since she is now a woman, but she is slow to "adapt" to this particular "convention." The word "convention" here implies that society's expectation that Orlando will love a man is based on convenience and what makes others most comfortable, not on how Orlando feels or whom she finds attractive.

In fact, Orlando's new identity as a woman only serves to "quicken and deepen" her attraction to women. Now, she knows their secrets and is privy to "a thousand hints and mysteries" that weren't readily apparent to her as a man. This discovery suggests that love is most effortless or natural when experienced between those of the same sex. Woolf implies that love between the opposite sex is full of "obscurity" and divisions that result in "innumerable impurities." In other words, love between a man and a woman will lead to despair and "gloom." On the other hand, Woolf argues that love between two women, or two men for that matter, removes this "obscurity" and reveals "truth and beauty."

> No sooner had she returned to her home in Blackfriars than she was made aware of a succession of Bow Street runners and other grave emissaries from the Law Courts that she was a party to three major suits which had been preferred against her during her absence, as well as innumerable minor litigations, some arising out of, others depending on them. The chief charges against her were (1) that she was dead, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; (2) that she was a woman, which amounts to much the same thing; (3) that she was an English Duke who had married one Rosina Pepita, a dancer; and had had by her three sons, which sons now declaring that their father was deceased, claimed that all his property descended to them. Such grave charges as these would, of course, take time and money to dispose of. All her estates were put in Chancery and her tides pronounced in abeyance while the suits were under litigation.

Related Characters: Rosina Pepita, Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Orlando returns to England after many years and changing into a woman. This passage further underscores the sexism present in English society and the injustices Orlando must now face as a woman. Immediately upon returning to her London estate, the "Bow Street runners," London's police force, are dispatched to Orlando's home. Orlando's change of gender into a woman is portrayed almost like a crime, and Orlando is sued by the "Law Courts" simply for being a woman. Her change of gender has prompted "three major suits" and "innumerable minor litigations," most of which would be moot if she was still a man.

It has been over 100 years since Orlando left England for Constantinople, so, of course, Orlando is thought to be dead. However, the narrator claims that to be a woman "amounts to much the same thing." This is obviously more of Woolf's irony and satire, but it is nevertheless true. As a woman, Orlando has about as many rights as a corpse, which is to say she has very few. Orlando is "an English Duke," but she can't retain her title as a woman. Orlando's alleged sons (who are never mentioned until now), claim Orlando's property, causing all of Orlando's property to "put in Chancery." Chancery is a court that determines cases based on perceived fairness, not strictly according to law like the common courts. In this way, Woolf implies that Orlando's treatment upon becoming a woman is indeed unfair and is indicative of the broader injustice of sexism in

English society.

> The difference between the sexes is, happily, one of great profundity. 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. And perhaps in this she was only expressing rather more openly than usual—openness indeed was the soul of her nature—something that happens to most people without being thus plainly expressed. For here again, we come to a dilemma. 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. Of the complications and confusions which thus result every one has had experience; but here we leave the general question and note only the odd effect it had in the particular case of Orlando herself.

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 188-189

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the narrator is debating whether Orlando is most a woman or a man, underscoring Woolf's overreaching argument that the dichotomous male-versus-female understanding is merely a social construction, and that no one—be it a man or a woman—is entirely one gender or the other. Throughout the novel, clothing identifies one's gender as male or female; however, the narrator claims that clothing is "but a symbol of something hid deep beneath," which is to say that the gender one's clothes reflects is often at odds with how one truly identifies. Orlando's own change of gender is prompted by a change deep within her, and she likewise changes her clothing from that of a man to that of a woman to reflect this change, but the novel implies that Orlando is braver than most. "Most people" do not have Orlando's "openness," the narrator says. Thus, their clothing conceals their true gender rather than revealing it.

Woolf maintains that despite Orlando's change of gender, she is still largely the same person, but this isn't because the difference between the sexes is negligible. On the contrary, Woolf argues the difference between men and women is "profound." The reason why Orlando hasn't really changed is because she has *always* been both a man and a woman, as, the narrator asserts, the sexes "intermix" and each person "vacillates" naturally between the two, moving back and forth fluidly. As one typically dresses consistently as either male or female their whole life, their clothing is at times out of sync with this natural fluctuation of gender. This is bound to cause some "complications and confusions" in everyone, the narrator asserts, but for now, the narrator focuses only on Orlando's "particular case."

> Then the little gentleman said,
>
> He said next,
>
> He said finally,*
>
> Here, it cannot be denied, was true wit, true wisdom, true profundity. The company was thrown into complete dismay. One such saying was bad enough; but three, one after another, on the same evening! No society could survive it.
>
> "Mr. Pope," said old Lady R. in a voice trembling with sarcastic fury, "you are pleased to be witty." Mr. Pope flushed red. Nobody spoke a word. They sat in dead silence some twenty minutes. Then, one by one, they rose and slunk from the room.
>
> [...]
>
> *These sayings are too well known to require repetition, and besides, they are all to be found in his published works.

Related Characters: Lady R., Alexander Pope (speaker), Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange, which occurs when Alexander Pope shows up at Lady R.'s get-together, underscores Woolf's claim that truth is largely is an illusion. Orlando can't wait to go to Lady R.'s party, which is supposed to be the meeting place of "genius." Where there is genius, Orlando figures, there will be "truth," "wit," and "profundities"; however, Orlando finds this isn't necessarily the case. The genius of Lady R.'s is an illusion in which no true genius can exist without completing dismantling the entire situation, and this is exactly what happens when Alexander Pope, a "little gentlemen" on account of his short stature, arrives at the party and drops three witty comments in a row.

Of course, the book doesn't actually include what Pope says, and the asterisk after Pope's final comment correlates to a

small footnote in which she explains that Pope's comments "are too well known to require repetition, and besides, they are all to be found in his published works." What Pope says is undoubtedly witty, but it certainly isn't new, which further adds to the illusion of truth and wit at Lady R.'s gatherings. The poets who frequently attend her parties are not fountains of wit with profundities pouring from their mouths with every utterance. Even poets and intellectuals are limited in wit and truth, Woolf argues, and Lady R.'s party underscores this. Regardless of whether Pope is as witty as Orlando initially thinks, the wit recycled from Pope's published works is enough to shatter the illusion of genius at Lady R.'s reception, and it shatters Orlando's own illusions about the truth and wit of famous poets as well.

❝ It was happy for Orlando, though at first disappointing, that this should be so, for she now began to live much in the company of men of genius, yet after all they were not much different from other people. Addison, Pope, Swift, proved, she found, to be fond of tea. They liked arbours. They collected little bits of coloured glass. They adored grottoes. Rank was not distasteful to them. Praise was delightful. They wore plum-coloured suits one day and grey another. Mr. Swift had a fine malacca cane. Mr. Addison scented his handkerchiefs. Mr. Pope suffered with his head. A piece of gossip did not come amiss. Nor were they without their jealousies. (We are jotting down a few reflections that came to Orlando higgledy-piggledy.) At first, she was annoyed with herself for noticing such trifles, and kept a book in which to write down their memorable sayings, but the page remained empty.

Related Characters: Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Orlando takes Alexander Pope home with her and famous poets begin to gather at her house. This passage reflects Woolf's opinion that famous writers are just average people who aren't worthy of such praise and worship. Orlando admires poets above all else, and she longs to be a famous poet too, but the novel implies that there is very little difference between Orlando and Addison, Pope, and Swift. Orlando believes the men to be "geniuses," but she discovers they are "not much different from other people." In fact, Orlando learns that Addison, Pope, and Swift are downright boring. They do nothing but drink tea (Orlando despises tea), and they like ordinary things like flowers, art, and parks. The narrator even results to describing their suits, which are sometimes "grey" and sometimes "plum," and this suggests there is very little to remark upon about the men.

Orlando expects accomplished poets to be confident and not require "praise," but the poets find praise "delightful." Furthermore, the poets are not "without their jealousies," which, in addition to their love of praise, suggests that famous poets aren't really all that confident after all. The men even love "gossip" and record "a few reflections that came to Orlando higgledy-piggledy," which is to say they take time to write down complete nonsense. Orlando herself keeps a journal to record the poets' "memorable sayings," but she doesn't write anything down because the men have nothing at all profound to say. Just like Orlando discovers at Lady R.'s party, the poets' supposed wit and genius is but an illusion, and, the novel therefore implies, they are painfully ordinary people who don't warrant all the praise and worship Orlando heaps onto them.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ But the change did not stop at outward things. The damp struck within. Men felt the chill in their hearts; the damp in their minds. In a desperate effort to snuggle their feelings into some sort of warmth one subterfuge was tried after another. Love, birth, and death were all swaddled in a variety of fine phrases. The sexes drew further and further apart. No open conversation was tolerated. Evasions and concealments were sedulously practiced on both sides. And just as the ivy and the evergreen rioted in the damp earth outside, so did the same fertility show itself within. The life of the average woman was a succession of childbirths. She married at nineteen and had fifteen or eighteen children by the time she was thirty; for twins abounded. Thus, the British Empire came into existence

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 229

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs with the dawn of the 19th century, and it reflects the sweeping changes that occur within the Victorian era, which both Orlando and the narrator (and, it seems, Woolf as well) find completely disagreeable. With the new century has come a change in social climate, which begins to change the people as well. The Victorian era was

thought to be rather cold and prudish, and the language in this passage reflects this. As the cold settles in, the people try "to snuggle their feelings into some sort of warmth" through alternative phrases. Pregnancy, for example, while not spoken of outright, is "swaddled" in coded language, as are all references to sex, love, and death.

Still, the narrator argues, the coldness of the 19th century settles into the people, and men and women grow "further and further apart." In this new sexually repressed society, "open conversation," or the casual mingling of men and women, is not "tolerated." Sex is, for all intents and purposes, ignored, yet "evasions and concealments" are "sedulously," or diligently, practiced by men and women both. In this way, book implies that Victorian society is hypocritical, and while they may avoid talking about sex, they are certainly still having it, as the expectation that women will have "fifteen or eighteen children" suggests. Like many things in *Orlando*, the morality and sexual purity of the 19th century is an illusion, and the book exposes this common misconception.

❝ Meanwhile, she became conscious, as she stood at the window, of an extraordinary tingling and vibration all over her, as if she were made of a thousand wires upon which some breeze or errant fingers were playing scales. Now her toes tingled; now her marrow. She had the queerest sensations about the thigh bones. Her hairs seemed to erect themselves. Her arms sang and twanged as the telegraph wires would be singing and twanging in twenty years or so. But all this agitation seemed at length to concentrate in her hands; and then in one hand, and then in one finger of that hand, and then finally to contract itself so that it made a ring of quivering sensibility about the second finger of the left hand. And when she raised it to see what caused this agitation, she saw nothing—nothing but the vast solitary emerald which Queen Elizabeth had given her. And was that not enough? she asked.

Related Characters: Queen Elizabeth I, Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239-240

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Orlando is unable to write because of a persistent tingling in her left hand. This quote underscores the power of society's sexist expectations to influence a woman's behavior, even when these expectations run counter to her desires. There is an "extraordinary tingling and vibration" all over Orlando's body that originates in the second finger of her left hand because she is not married like the sexually repressed and stuffy society of Victorian era England expects. In nearly 300 years, Orlando has only considered marriage once before, but now Orlando's urge to marry is so strong that it tingles down to her feet and reaches "her marrow." She doesn't even have a groom in mind, but Orlando knows she must find someone, anyone, to marry in order to fit in with the age.

The narrator's language, too, reflects Orlando's sudden impulse to marry. As the vibration makes it way through Orlando's entire body, inside and out, including her hair, it settles in "a ring of quivering sensibility" on the second finger of her left hand. This description connotes a gold wedding band, but the only ring on the second finger of Orlando's left hand is the emerald given to her by Queen Elizabeth I. Orlando asks if this ring is "enough," but the narrator implies that it isn't. Not only does Victorian society expect Orlando to marry, it certainly does not approve of Orlando's presumably sexual relationship with the Queen that is represented within the lavish gift. Thus, Orlando is forced to conform to the era and marry a man, despite deep feelings to the contrary.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ "Ah!" he said, heaving a little sigh, which was yet comfortable enough, "Ah! my dear lady, the great days of literature are over. Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson—those were the giants. Dryden, Pope, Addison—those were the heroes. All, all are dead now. And whom have they left us? Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle!"—he threw an immense amount of scorn into his voice. "The truth of it is," he said, pouring himself a glass of wine, "that all our young writers are in the pay of booksellers. They turn out any trash that serves to pay their tailor's bills. It is an age," he said, helping himself to hors d'oeuvres, "marked by precious conceits and wild experiments—none of which the Elizabethans would have tolerated for an instant."

Related Characters: Nicholas Greene (speaker), Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, John Dryden, Ben Jonson, The Shabby Man / William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe / Kit Marlowe, Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Orlando has just run into Nicholas Greene during the 19th century, and Greene's critique of English poetry is

much the same as it was during the 17th century. This passage portrays Nicholas Greene, the personification of a literary critic, as completely hypocritical, and therefore meaningless and arbitrary. Orlando has spent much of her life, as many writers do, trying to please the critics, and Woolf implies that to do so is often impossible and quite pointless. While Greene sings the praises of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Pope now, he previously accused them of writing only for money and lacking "divine inspiration," or "Glawr."

Of course, Greene's opinion is not rooted in a poet's talent or work per se but in his resistance to contemporary literary techniques, no matter when they occur. Greene doesn't appreciate Dryden and Addison until their writing is no longer considered new and it is 300 years later. During the 1600s, when Dryden and Addison are writing, Greene has little use for them and prefers instead the classics of ancient Greece. Here, Greene again attempts to tell Orlando "the truth" about the state of poetry in England, but this truth, too, is subjective. Greene claims that contemporary literature is full of "wild experiments," and Woolf's novel can indeed be described as such. In this way, Woolf implies that writers should not write for critics but instead for themselves.

❝ That Orlando had gone a little too far from the present moment will, perhaps, strike the reader who sees her now preparing to get into her motor car with her eyes full of tears and visions of Persian mountains. And indeed, it cannot be denied that the most successful practitioners of the art of life, often unknown people by the way, somehow contrive to synchronize the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison, and the present is neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten in the past. Of them we can justly say that they live precisely the sixty-eight or seventy-two years allotted them on the tombstone. Of the rest, some we know to be dead, though they walk among us; some are not yet born, though they go through the forms of life; others are hundreds of years old though they call themselves thirty-six. The true length of a person's life, whatever the *Dictionary of National Biography* may say, is always a matter of dispute.

Related Characters: Orlando

Related Themes:

Page Number: 305-306

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs at the end of the novel as Orlando climbs into her car and drives away, a moment that once again draws attention to how long Orlando's life has been. This quote reflects Orlando's unique perception of time, which also explains Orlando's incredibly long life and Woolf's argument of the subjectivity of time. When Orlando is first introduced during the 16th century, there are no steam engines much less cars. But as Orlando gets into her car, her eyes are "full of tears and visions of Persian mountains," which is to say her eyes are full of the past. Orlando doesn't just live in one place or time; her memories randomly take her back to many places and times. Some people, narrator claims, don't live this way, and "they live precisely the sixty-eight or seventy-two years allotted them on the tombstone," but this is not Orlando.

Woolf argues that one's life does not necessarily begin with birth and end in death. Life can extend beyond these boundaries through experiences and memories, which, Woolf implies, can also be gathered from history and literature. The real-life inspiration for Orlando, Vita Sackville-West, obviously did not live for nearly 400 years. Instead, Woolf means to imply that Sackville-West's experiences researching her family's history and writing a book about them have given her vicarious experiences of past eras that her subjective mind has weaved into an alternate reality. This subjective reality, Woolf argues, is just as important as the objective facts reported in the *Dictionary of Nation Biography* and is much more reflective of "the true length of a person's life."

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

"Many friends have helped me in writing this book," Woolf writes. "Some are dead and so illustrious that I scarcely dare name them, yet no one can read or write without being perpetually in the debt of Defoe, Sir Thomas Browne, Sterne, Sir Walter Scott, Lord Macaulay, Emily Brontë, De Quincey, and Walter Pater,—to name the first that come to mind." Woolf thanks others who are still living, but they "are less formidable for that very reason," she says. She thanks Madame Lopokova, the wife of J. M. Keynes, for assisting with the Russian language and Mr. Roger Fry for helping her understand art. Woolf is also indebted to her nephew, Julian Bell, and her brother-in-law, Clive Bell, for their "inspiring" criticism.

Woolf's preface is largely a list of people she would like to thank, and the fact that she begins with the famous writers who have influenced her reflects the importance of literature, both in the novel and in Woolf's own life. Sir Thomas Browne is referenced throughout the book and Woolf later references Emily Brontë and Laurence Sterne as well. Woolf implies that death makes one more "formidable," or illustrious, and this preoccupation with death and dying is later seen in the character of Orlando, especially in the crypt of his family's estate.

Woolf also acknowledges her mother-in-law and Mr. and Mrs. T. S. Eliot, as well as Lytton Strachey, E. M. Forster, and Harold Nicolson for their assistance and support in writing *Orlando*. She thanks her sister, Vanessa Bell, and her niece and nephew, Angelica and Quentin Bell, as well as the British Museum and Record Office for their "wonted courtesy." In closing, Woolf thanks a "gentleman in America, who has generously and gratuitously corrected the punctuation, the botany, the entomology, the geography, and the chronology" of Woolf's previous works. "I hope," Woolf writes, "[he will] not spare his services on the present occasion."

Woolf thanks most of the people belonging to the Bloomsbury Group, and those closely associated with it; however, whom Woolf thanks isn't nearly as important as whom she doesn't. Vita Sackville-West, whom Orlando *is a fictionalized biography of, isn't mentioned at all in the preface, even though Woolf thanks upwards of 50 other people. Woolf does dedicate the book to Sackville-West, but the dedication is the only time Woolf explicitly mentions her.*

CHAPTER 1

Orlando swings his sword at the severed head of a Moor hanging from the rafters in the attic of his father's "gigantic," and old, house. "He—for there can be no doubt of his sex, though the **fashion** of the time did something to disguise it," the biographer writes, is eager to ride, like his father and grandfather, "in the barbarian fields of Africa." There, they strike "many heads of many colors off many shoulders," and then they bring the heads "back to hang from the rafters." But Orlando is only 16, so he can only "lunge and plunge" at the "Pagan" head in the attic.

Woolf immediately draws attention to Orlando's gender. She ultimately argues that gender is a social construct, and the biographer's comment here about "the fashion of the time" implies the same. Elizabethan fashion was incredibly elaborate and feminine, which obscures Orlando's gender.

Orlando's family has always been noble. They arrived from "the northern mists wearing coronets on their heads," and their massive family estate is proof of this. Large stained-glass windows line the vast attic, and Orlando walks over to one and opens it. The attic is bathed in a myriad of red, blue, and yellow light, "like a butterfly's wing," and it illuminates "the shapely legs, the handsome body, and the well-set shoulders" of Orlando. His face is lit by the "heraldic light," and the biographer who narrates the book celebrates their luck in having such a beautiful subject: "Happy the mother who bears, happier still the biographer who records the life of such a one!"

This quick account of Orlando's family history establishes him as a nobleman with deep ties to the English soil. Woolf may not thank Sackville-West in the preface, but she certainly flatters her here. In having the fictional biographer describe Orlando, Woolf is effectively describing Sackville-West, telling her she is beautiful. This description is also a bit tongue-in-cheek; Sackville-West's mother was furious after reading Orlando, *and she was openly critical of her daughter and her relationships with women.*

Orlando's cheeks are red and "covered with peach down," and his lips sit perfectly "over teeth of an exquisite and almond whiteness." His nose is "short" and his hair "dark," and his eyes are "like drenched violets." the narrator, however, does "admit" to "a thousand disagreeables," but "it is the aim of every good biographer to ignore" them. Orlando is "disturbed" by the sight of his mother in the garden below, but the sounds and sights of the garden appeals to his love of nature. His head begins to spin in a "riot and confusion" of "passion and emotions which every good biographer detests," the narrator claims.

In this passage, Woolf identifies the problem with biography. Biographies of the past, like those written by Woolf's father for the Dictionary of National Biography, *or* DNB, *ignore "a thousand disagreeables" in portraying their subjects. Woolf argues that a good biography draws attention to both the good and bad of a subject. This passage also alludes to the "rainbow," the intangible part of the subject mentioned later in the book—the "passion and emotions"—that are usually omitted in biographical writing.*

Orlando goes to a desk and opens a writing book with the title, "Æthelbert: A Tragedy in Five Acts," and quickly writes out 10 pages of poetry in 10 minutes. Orlando is "fluent," but "abstract," and he never writes a line in the way he would speak. Such language is the mark of the 16th century, the narrator notes. Like all other poets, Orlando is "forever describing nature," and this is where he is stalled now. "Green in nature is one thing," the narrator suggests, "green in literature another." There is a "natural antipathy" between nature and letters; "bring them together and they tear each other to pieces." Frustrated, Orlando stands and walks out of the attic, striking his foot on a chest in the process—Orlando is a "trifle clumsy."

Orlando's writing changes with each age he lives through. Here, in the Elizabethan age, he writes a tragic play, which is popular at the time. Shakespeare is writing during this time, as is Marlowe, and Orlando is trying to emulate them. Woolf is repeatedly critical of overly complex language in poetry and prose throughout the novel, and she pokes fun at Orlando here for using such language. This passage also establishes Orlando's love of nature as a core part of his identity, which is consistent despite the sweeping changes that take place in the novel.

Orlando avoids his family and the household staff as he moves through the house. "The biographer should here call attention to the fact that this clumsiness is often mated with a love of solitude," the narrator writes. Orlando loves "solitary places, vast views, and to feel himself for ever and ever and ever alone." Outside the huge mansion, Orlando can see the English Channel in the distance, as well as "the spires of London." His family's estate takes up most of the countryside in immediate view, including his father's house, as well as his uncle's and aunt's. After about an hour of aimless wandering outdoors, Orlando hears a "shrill sound" come from his father's house and the servants spring into action, dashing back and forth in the dimly lit windows. The Queen has arrived.

Orlando's clumsiness and love of solitude are also consistent throughout the novel. When Orlando later transforms into a woman, her clumsiness makes her actions "abrupt" and unladylike. She is prone to spilling the tea and other such accidents that give her a rather masculine appearance. She also keeps her love of solitude, and often goes out of her way to be alone. Like Orlando's love for nature, Woolf implies that certain aspects of one's identity, their "true self," remains the same, even in the face of "incessant" change.

Orlando runs back to the house and darts up the staircase. In his room, he "dips his head" and washes his hands. He trims his nails and changes his **clothes**, putting on "crimson breeches, lace collar, waistcoat of taffeta, and shoes with rosettes" using only two candles for light and "six inches of looking-glass." He is ready in less than 10 minutes, but he is "terribly late." Orlando runs downstairs, past the servants' dinner table, where a "rather fat, rather shabby man" sits holding a pen. Orlando stops. "Is this a poet?" he wonders. "Is he writing poetry?" Orlando has "the wildest, most absurd, extravagant ideas about poets and poetry." He hesitates. "Tell me," he wants to say, "everything in the whole world."

Here, Woolf again draws attention to Orlando's clothes. Orlando gets dressed amazingly fast, something women stereotypically take much longer to do. He is always able to dress quickly, even as a woman, which disrupts popular gender stereotypes. This also reflects Woolf's central argument that gender is a social construction that manifests itself through clothing. Orlando is a man, and his clothing says as much, even though it is quite feminine compared to Woolf's modern ideals.

The shabby man quickly writes down several lines and then looks directly at Orlando. Struck by his "shyness," Orlando runs away, toward the Queen's receiving line, where he drops to his knees and bows his head. The Queen approaches immediately and accepts the bowl of rose water Orlando holds up as a gift. Orlando doesn't look up, and he can only see her hand as she takes the bowl. It is a "commanding hand," but also "nervous, crabbed, [and] sickly." If Orlando were to raise his head, he would see the Queen's "light yellow" eyes, as well as her furs and "brocades and gems."

Men and women alike fall in love with Orlando left and right in the novel, which Woolf seems to imply is the case with Sackville-West as well. Woolf even uses some of Sackville-West's previous relationships to describe Orlando's exploits, providing further evidence that Orlando is a thinly veiled fictionalization of Vita Sackville-West.

Likewise, the Queen is only able to see the top of Orlando's head and the "long, curled hair" bent before her. Orlando's head and hair "implies a pair of the finest legs that a young nobleman has ever stood upright upon; and violet eyes; and a heart of gold," but he never once looks up. That night, as Orlando sleeps "in ignorance," the Queen gifts the "great monastic house that had been the Archbishop's and then the King's to Orlando's father."

Knole, the estate belonging to Vita Sackville-West's family, was gifted to her own ancestor in much the same way. Knole originally belonged to an Archbishop who gifted it to Henry VIII, Elizabeth I's father. Elizabeth I then gave it to her cousin, Thomas Sackville, Vita Sackville-West's ancestor, to keep him close to court in 1566.

Two years later, Orlando receives an invitation from the Queen to join her court at Whitehall. "Here," the Queen says as Orlando arrives, "comes my innocent!" To her, Orlando is "the very image of a noble gentleman," and, on the inside (she can "read him like a page"), he is full of "strength, grace, romance, folly, poetry, [and] youth." Pulling a ring from the "swollen" joint of her finger, the Queen presents it to Orlando and names him her "Treasurer and Steward." She then bestows upon him the "jeweled order of the Garter," and from that day forward, Orlando is never "denied" a thing.

Like Orlando, Queen Elizabeth made Thomas Sackville her "Treasurer and Steward" in 1594, which further connects Orlando to Sackville-West. The Queen's description of Orlando as "the very image of a noble gentleman" is certainly ironic, since Orlando is quite feminine and later transforms into a woman. While the "jeweled order of the Garter" is a real order of chivalry, the word garter also refers to a woman's undergarment that is traditionally linked to sex. This passage thus makes the subtle suggestion that Orlando and the Queen's relationship is sexual in nature—which is particularly ironic, given that Queen Elizabeth I was known for her virginity.

The Queen, who knows "a man" when she sees one, deeply loves Orlando. She gives him land and houses and calls him "the son of her old age; the limb of her infirmity." That winter, as the snow begins to fall, the Queen sees in the mirror (which she keeps "for fear of spies"), through the door (which is always open "for fear of murderers") a boy kissing a girl. "Could it be Orlando?" the Queen wonders. "Who in the Devil's name is the brazen hussy?" The Queen grabs her sword and "violently" strikes the mirror, shattering the glass. From that day on, she is "stricken" and prone to "groaning" of "man's treachery."

The Queen is portrayed as excessively paranoid. She fears spies and murderers, and she doesn't know for sure that the boy here is Orlando, but she has convinced herself it is. This, too, reflects truth's subjectivity. Whether Orlando kissed the girl or not is irrelevant; the Queen believes he did, so, therefore, it is true in her eyes. Furthermore, if the Queen's relationship with Orlando is platonic as her reputation as a virgin suggests, she likely wouldn't be so upset at the sight of him kissing a girl—yet another suggestion that Orlando and the Queen are involved sexually.

It is, perhaps, Orlando's "fault," the narrator writes, but "are we to blame him?" It is, after all, the Elizabethan age. Their morals are different, as well as their poets. Their weather, too, is different and has "another temper altogether." The food is different, and the light is different—"Everything is different." Elizabethan poets sing "beautifully" of "roses" and "violence," and what the poets write "in rhyme, the young people translate into practice." So, the biographer concludes, "if Orlando follows the leading of the climate, of the poets, of the age itself, […] we can scarcely bring ourselves to blame him."

Woolf again implies that Orlando writes the way he does—"abstract" and "long" with complex language—because of the age he lives in. In this way, literary styles and conventions are portrayed as artificial and constructed as well. Orlando's writing changes with each new age, but he (later, she) ultimately concludes that it is better not to try to write like someone else. In Orlando, *Woolf is attempting to break with traditional forms of literary expression, and it starts with rejecting the form and style of traditional writers.*

"As for the girl," the narrator writes of the "brazen hussy" kissing Orlando, "we know no more than Queen Elizabeth herself." The girl could have been anyone, for Orlando's "taste" is "broad." His grandmother "had worn a smock and carried milk pails," and this mix of "brown earth and blue blood" gave him a certain "liking for low company, especially for that of lettered people whose wits so often keep them under." Orlando is fond of going to pubs and bars, "wrapped in a **grey cloak** to hide the star at his neck and the garter as his knee," where he listens to the stories of sailors. There, the women sit on his knee and put their arms around his neck, and they suspect "that something out of the common lay hid beneath his duffle cloak."

Orlando is constantly attracted to women below his social status as a nobleman, and later as a noblewoman as well. Orlando connects this "liking for low company" to his grandmother's identity as a servant, and it, too, is consistent throughout the novel. Poets during the Elizabethan age were rarely noble and were often poor. By hiding his nobility under his clothes, Orlando more easily blends in with the lower classes, and comes one step closer to being like the poets he admires.

But Orlando soon grows disillusioned with the "primitive manners of the people" and returns to court, where "many ladies" are "ready to show him their favours." Orlando first meets Clorinda, a "sweet-mannered gentle lady," and dates her for nearly six months, but she has "white eyelashes" and can't stand the sight of blood or roasted meet. She is also "much under the influence of the Priests," and when she tries to "reform Orlando of his sins, which sickens him," he stops calling on her.

Orlando's disillusionment with the "primitive manners of the people" makes him look a bit like a snob, something Orlando ruminates on later in the novel. This reflects Woolf's own question as well, as she famously referred to herself as a snob on several different occasions and even wrote a paper entitled "Am I a Snob?" in 1936.

Clorinda tragically catches smallpox and dies, and Orlando meets Favilla, the daughter of a poor man from Somersetshire, who "had worked her way up at court" with her "assiduity" and eyes. One day, Orlando witnesses Favilla beat a **dog** that had ripped her silk stocking (of which she had few, the narrator points out). Forever a "passionate lover of animals," Orlando suddenly notices that Favilla's teeth are "crooked," which "is a sure sign of a perverse and cruel disposition in woman," so he breaks off the relationship.

Dogs are mentioned repeatedly throughout the novel, and they are symbolic of Orlando's love for nature. He loves all "beasts," but he especially loves dogs and is never without at least one. He doesn't notice that Favilla's teeth are crooked—that is, he doesn't find her unattractive or flawed—until after she beats the dog. Thus, it isn't Favilla's teeth that are "a sure sign of a perverse and cruel" woman, it is her treatment of the dog.

Next, Orlando meets Euphrosyne, as he calls her in his sonnets, and she is "the most serious of his flames." She is of noble birth like Orlando, and her family tree is "old and deeply rooted." Euphrosyne is "fair, florid, and a trifle phlegmatic," but she is "never without a **whippet or spaniel** at her knee." She will make a perfect wife for Orlando, and by the time of the Great Frost, the lawyers are busy drawing up contracts.

"Phlegmatic" is a reference to the four temperaments and the four humors. Phlegmatic relates to bile, and it is associated with people who are reserved and introverted. Euphrosyne is indeed a bit distant, but her love for dogs helps to make her more attractive to Orlando, who is obviously bored by her dullness.

All of England seems to freeze with the Great Frost. Birds freeze in flight, and cattle and sheep drop dead from the cold across the country. Entire herds of swine freeze in the middle of a country roads, and all the trade and the economy come to a halt. As the people "suffer," London enjoys "a carnival of the utmost brilliancy." The frozen city is decorated and lit up, and the people dance among the frozen ships and people near London Bridge. Orlando is "clumsy," and as he brings "his feet together" in dance, at "about six in the evening of the seventh of January," he notices a mysterious figure skating on the ice.

The passing of time is very subjective in the novel, but the fictional biographer who narrates the book frequently gives the exact date of certain events, like in this passage. The exact year is often not mentioned, and the reader must guess instead. The reader experiences time much like Orlando does, and while it feels like only a decade or so has passed since the beginning of the novel, it is more than a 100 years later.

The figure emerges from the Muscovite Embassy, and, since their **clothes**—"[a] loose tunic and trousers of the Russian fashion"—obscure their gender, Orlando knows not if the figure is a man or woman. It must be a man, Orlando thinks, for "no woman" can "skate with such speed and vigor." As the figure moves closer, however, he can make out the shape of breasts beneath the tunic—it is a woman. Orlando "stares" and "trembles," he "turns hot" then "cold," and longs to be with her. Suddenly, he remembers Lady Euphrosyne "upon his arm."

This passage also reflects Woolf's overarching idea that gender is a social construction. Orlando believes Sasha to be a man based on her clothing, and he initially responds to her as such. She skates with "speed and vigor," which implies a level of strength and stamina that popular stereotype often associates with men rather than women. As soon as Orlando realizes Sasha is a woman, he immediately becomes "hot" and is obviously attracted to her. This implies that how one perceives gender is deeply influenced by social norms.

The woman's name is Princess Marousha Staniloska Dagmar Natasha Iliana Romanovich, but Orlando will come to call her Sasha, and she is the daughter, or perhaps the niece, of the Muscovite Ambassador. Her time at court has been trying, as no one speaks Russian, and she doesn't speak English. Sasha speaks French as well, but very few at court can speak that language either. One night at dinner, after attempting to talk to two nobles, Sasha gives up all hope of communicating and asks Orlando to pass the salt. "With all the pleasure in the world, Madame," Orlando says in French as he hands Sasha the salt.

Like the Romani people later in the novel, Sasha is unimpressed by the English court. She doesn't speak the language or share the culture or customs, and she is mostly miserable there. While many people in England would no doubt love to be invited to court, Sasha is miserable, again harkening to Woolf's argument of subjectivity.

After the incident with the saltshaker, the "intimacy" between Orlando and Sasha becomes "the scandal of the Court." Orlando begins to pay Sasha "far more attention than mere civility demands," and even though no one can understand the French language they speak, their "unintelligible speech" is accompanied by "blushes and laughter." Orlando begins to "change." He becomes "animated" and "full of grace and manly courtesy." He is, of course, "betrothed to another," but when Euphrosyne (whose real name is Lady Margaret) drops her handkerchief, Orlando never picks it up, and when she falls skating on the ice, he does not run to her.

Orlando later shares "unintelligible speech" with Shel, too, in the form of the language they create to wire entire conversations via short telegrams while Shel is out to sea. This suggests that meaning somehow transcends language and implies much more than what is spoken or written. This makes Orlando's job as a poet, and the narrator's job as a biographer, exceedingly difficult, for they must put into words that which cannot be fully expressed through language alone.

Orlando doesn't try to hide his feelings for Sasha, and he frequently finds reason to spend time with her. One day, Sasha says to Orlando, "Take me away. I detest your English mob." Her homeland of Russia is sparsely populated, and she detests the hoards of people at court. They smell "bad," she says, and it is much "like being in a cage." Orlando and Sasha skate up a secluded bend in the frozen river, where, "hot with skating and with love," Orlando "takes [Sasha] in his arms," and he "knows, for the first time, [...] the delights of love."

While Orlando is delighting in love, it is unclear if the feeling is mutual, since Sasha so badly wants to leave. The novel later claims that male poets have defined love as the "slipping off the petticoat," and Orlando does indeed associate love with sex.

Orlando tells Sasha of his other loves, who, "compared with her," are nothing but "wood," "sackcloth," and "cinders." Suddenly, Orlando falls "into one of his moods of melancholy." Anything can precipitate such a mood, or nothing at all, and Orlando throws himself on the ice, thinking of nothing but death. "All ends in death," Orlando says to Sasha. "All ends in death." She "stares at him," or perhaps "sneers at him," as he showers her with compliments. She is like "snow, cream, marble, cherries, alabaster, golden wire," he says. He decides these words are all inadequate—she is "like a fox."

Orlando's reference to Sasha as a fox harkens to Orlando's love of nature, which crops up throughout the novel. Although this comparison highlights the depth of Orlando's feelings for Sasha, she doesn't seem to feel the same way. Her temperament suggests that she finds Orlando's sudden mood swing into depression unattractive.

Sasha is quiet as Orlando talks. When he is done recounting his entire family history, he asks Sasha about her own. She answers politely but seems distant. There is a sudden "awkwardness" between them that Orlando can't quite put his finger on. They decide to skate farther up the river, where the Russian ship sits waiting. Sasha has forgotten some things on the ship, she says, and they climb aboard to find them. They soon come upon a young Russian man, and after a short exchange with Sasha in Russian, he agrees to help her retrieve her belongings.

Sasha doesn't seem to love Orlando like he loves her—hence the "awkwardness" between them—but Orlando isn't able to see this. He spends most of his time talking about himself and only asks about Sasha after he is done with his own story, which he obviously considers significant and worth noting. Orlando's noble heritage doesn't impress Sasha, who knows only her own life in Russia.

As Orlando waits for Sasha, he thinks about Euphrosyne. He is set to marry her soon, but it all seems "so palpably absurd" that he can't bear to keep thinking of it. Her family will be angry, and his friends will "deride him," but he has made up his mind. He will go to Russia with Sasha. After an hour, Orlando grows impatient and goes to look for Sasha. He finds her in the hold of the ship sitting on the Russian man's knee, locked in an embrace.

There is clearly something going on between Sasha and the Russian man, and this is further evidence that Sasha does not love Orlando as he loves her. Ironically, while Orlando was deciding to go to Russia to be with his love, Sasha was with another man.

Suddenly, the light is "blotted out in a red cloud by [Orlando's] rage," and a "deadly sickness" comes over him. He falls to the floor and must drink a bit of brandy to "revive" himself. The man was simply helping her with a heavy box, Sasha says as she turns "red" and stomps her feet. She calls "upon her Gods to destroy her, if she, a Romanovitch, had lain in the arms of a common seaman." Orlando "yields; believes her; and asks her pardon," and they climb down the ladder of the ship. On the way out, Sasha yells back to the man in Russian, but something about her tone reminds Orlando of the way Sasha speaks to him in French.

Sasha's meaning again transcends words, and even though Orlando can't understand what she says to the man, he still senses the substance of her words. The novel later claims people die in "small doses" to be able to withstand the pain of life, and that is indeed what Orlando does here. He must be "revived" with liquor after a "deadly sickness." In other words, Orlando is so crushed by Sasha's deceit, he must die a little bit to keep living.

Back on the ice, Orlando and Sasha skate toward London. Sasha is "tenderer than usual and even more delightful. She talks of Russia and praises Orlando "for his love of beasts; for his gallantry; for his legs." As night falls, "everything suffer[s] emaciation and transformation." As they move closer to the carnival, Orlando can make out the people enjoying the festivities, and their privacy comes to an end. All of London is out, skating and telling fortunes, and many people stand facing a stage where a black man is "waving his arms and vociferating."

It seems that Sasha is delightful and tender because she feels guilty about deceiving Orlando. The "emaciation and transformation" of the approaching night foreshadows Orlando's own transformation, which is also approaching, and it also harkens to Orlando's connection to nature. Here, the frost fair is well underway, and the black man upon the stage is an actor. Plays were a popular form of entertainment at the time, especially at fairs and festivals.

On the stage, "a woman in white" lies upon a bed. The crowd yells and stomps their feet and throws scraps of food at the actors. To Orlando, however, the "sinuous melody of the words" are "like music." The Moor's "frenzy" on stage seems to be Orlando's, and when the Moor suffocates the woman in the bed, killing her, it is Sasha whom he really kills. The play ends and all goes dark. Tears streak Orlando's face as he looks to the sky. "Ruin and death," he thinks, "cover all. The life of man ends in the grave. Worms devour us."

Given the many references to Shakespeare throughout the novel, it's possible that the play being performed is Shakespeare's Othello, in which the main character, Othello, kills his wife because he thinks she has been unfaithful. Orlando, too, suspects that Sasha has been unfaithful, and he fantasizes about killing her just as Othello kills Desdemona in Shakespeare's play. The words are "like music" to Orlando because he idolizes Shakespeare above all other poets.

"Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse / Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe / Should yawn—" Orlando says out loud. Suddenly, he remembers. "Jour de ma vie!" he cries to Sasha. Tonight, is the night. He will meet Sasha at an old inn where their horses are waiting, and they will flee together. But it is an hour before midnight when they are to meet, so they part and go to their tents.

Here, Orlando recites lines from Act 5, Scene 2 of Othello, which further reflects Orlando's admiration for Shakespeare. Orlando's comment, "Jour de ma vie!" which idiomatically translates to "Light of my life!" is the official motto of the Sackville family.

Orlando arrives early and waits for Sasha in the dark. He paces the courtyard listening carefully for footsteps in the dark. He hears only merchants heading home and women "of the quarter" whose "errands" are not "so innocent." Few lanterns light the street, and while Orlando listens for every footstep, he hears nothing of Sasha's. She is to arrive by herself, **clothed** "in her cloak and trousers, booted like a man."

Sasha's independence does not align with popular female stereotypes of the time. That Sasha agreed to the plan suggests that she isn't afraid to walk alone at night, and Orlando associates Sasha's courage with her masculine dress, which again suggests that one's clothes largely construct how others view their gender.

Suddenly, Orlando is "struck in the face by a blow, soft, yet heavy, on the side of his cheek." He is hit again and again, and it takes him a moment to realize it is raining. Softly and slowly at first, then a forceful and torrential downfall that quickly soaks Orlando. Steam rises from the ground, and the heavy pounding of the rain drowns out the sound of approaching footsteps. Then, he hears the clock tower in the distance strike midnight. Orlando's "superstitious" side tells him Sasha will arrive by the sixth strike of the hour, but she doesn't. By the twelfth and final strike, Orlando knows "the truth." As the other clocks strike around London, the entire world seems "to ring with the news of her deceit and his derision."

Orlando has a deep connection to nature, and here nature mirrors Orlando's feelings. He knows that Sasha isn't coming, and a darkness begins to consume him. Striking clocks are typically associated with revelations within the novel, and here Orlando finally realizes "the truth" of Sasha's deception.

Orlando stands unmoving until he hears the clock strike two, then he climbs on his horse and begins to ride. He doesn't know where he is going, but he is heading in the direction of the river and the sea. He soon finds himself near the Thames and discovers that the river has "gained its freedom in the night." The water is moving again, and icebergs of every imaginable size float everywhere. People, caught out on the ice during the festival, are trapped on floating icebergs, sweeping out to sea. Orlando can faintly hear them "crying vainly for help," and some even jump into the water and try to grab the golden goblets and various treasures that bob in the debris-filled water.

The image on the Thames seems very surreal and fictional, but it is quite accurate historically. Many people were killed when the ice began to break up at the end of frost festivals, and vendors and merchants frequently suffered a loss of property when they failed to get their exhibitions off the ice in time. When the ice began to melt during the Great Frosts, it often did so quickly, at times in less than a day. While such freezing and thawing is unheard of today, is was quite common during the 16th–18th centuries and happened, on average, every 10 years or so.

As Orlando stares at the river, "a cat suckling its young" floats by on an iceberg, followed by "a table laid sumptuously for a supper of twenty" and "a couple in bed." Orlando rides up the river a bit more, to where he can see the Ambassadors' ships anchored out at sea. They are all there—the French, Spanish, and Austrian—but not the Russian ship. Orlando begins to wonder if it has sunk, and then he looks to the horizon. He can vaguely see the outline of the Russian ship moving out to sea. Standing in the water, Orlando yells at Sasha "all the insults that have ever been the lot of her sex," and the rushing waters of the Thames "took his words, and tossed at his feet a broken pot and a little straw."

Orlando doesn't know for sure that Sasha is on the ship, but he senses it all the same. Again, this scene seems completely unbelievable—the cat, the floating dinner table, and the couple in bed—and it adds to the magical quality of the book. Despite Orlando's great connection to nature, it seems to care very little about his heartache and gives him only garbage and debris in exchange for his pain.


CHAPTER 2

"The biographer is now faced with a difficulty which is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over," the narrator writes. Until now, Orlando's life has been pieced together by documents— "both private and historical"—and they have enabled the narrator to do their job, "which is to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth." Much of Orlando's story, however, is "dark, mysterious, and undocumented." Thus, it also cannot be easily explained. The "simple duty" of the biographer, the narrator declares, "is to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may."

The biographer narrating the book repeatedly interrupts to add additional insight into Orlando's character or to lament the problems of biography. Here, the narrator implies that much of what really matters in the life of a subject cannot be found in historical documents, even if they are available. "The indelible footprints of truth" are not found within objective facts, but in the "dark, mysterious, and undocumented.


Following the winter of the Great Frost and Orlando's relationship with Sasha, he is "exiled from Court," so he goes to his country house and lives "in complete solitude." In June, on the morning of Saturday the 18th, Orlando fails to wake at his usual time (7:45 a.m. "precisely"). For an entire week, despite excessive noise and a mustard plaster, Orlando sleeps without food or "any sign of life." On the seventh day, he wakes at precisely 7:45 a.m., gets dressed, and sends for his horse, as if he has "woken from a single night's slumber."

Orlando's weeklong slumber marks his first transformation, and it, too, is like a small "dose" of death. Sasha's deception wrecks Orlando, so he dies just a little bit to dull the pain and go on living. Prior to modern medicine, mustard plaster was often applied to the skin to promote healing and is still practiced by modern herbalists. Time again is subjective; the date and time only matter in this case because Orlando fails to wake up at his usual time, so the book draws attention to it.

"Some change," the narrator writes, has "taken place in the chambers of [Orlando's] brain." He has "an imperfect recollection of his past life," and he is "puzzled" by the events of the last six months. However, whenever Russia, ships, or princesses are mentioned, Orlando falls "into a gloom." Orlando visits several doctors and is prescribed "rest and exercise," "starvation and nourishment," "society and solitude," and "the usual sedatives and irritants." The medical consensus is that Orlando "had been asleep for a week."

Orlando's variety of medical treatments gestures to Woolf's own experiences with depression and doctors. Woolf was hospitalized on multiple occasions because of her mental health, and she was frequently prescribed alternating treatments of rest and exercise and starvation and nourishment. This passage contains a tinge of sarcasm, betraying Woolf's own opinion—so it seems—that such treatments are ridiculous.

"But if sleep it was," the narrator asks, "of what nature, we can scarcely refrain from asking, are such sleeps as these?" The narrator questions if they are "remedial measures," in which painful memories that are "likely to cripple life forever" are scrubbed from the mind: "Has the finger of death to be laid on the tumult of life from time to time lest rend us asunder?" The narrator reasons that perhaps people must take death "in small doses daily" in order to keep on living. Perhaps Orlando had "died for a week, and then come to life," but if that is the case, "of what nature is death and of what nature is life?" Orlando thinks of these questions and waits "well over half an hour for an answer."

Orlando struggles with the meaning of life and death for most of the novel, even though he lives for centuries and shows no outward signs of aging. This passage implies that Orlando is able to live as long as he does because he dies in "small doses daily." As the novel will soon reveal, each one of Orlando's transformations (i.e., deaths) serve to recharge him and ready him for the next chapter in life.

Orlando's life begins to reflect one of "extreme solitude." No one is sure just how he spends his time, but he has retained a full staff of servants on his estate, and they go about cleaning empty rooms and worrying about Orlando. He disappears for hours on end, and Mrs. Grimsditch, the housekeeper, fears constantly that something terrible has become of him. Mr. Dupper, the chaplain, tries to calm her fears, but even he is worried. All of Orlando's servants hold "him in high respect," even the "Blackamoor," who was given the name Grace Robinson to make a "Christian woman of her."

Mrs. Grimsditch, Mr. Dupper, and Grace Robinson each are names of actual servants employed at Knole, according to Sackville-West's own book about her family's history, Knole and the Sackvilles. *Details such as this directly point to Sackville-West as Woolf's inspiration for Orlando, even though she never mentions Sackville-West by name. On another note, Woolf describes Grace Robinson in racist terms using a dated term that is now considered an offensive racial slur.*

Orlando takes on "a strange delight in thoughts of death and decay." He often goes down into the crypt of the estate, where 10 generations of "his ancestors lay, coffin piled upon coffin." He holds the bones of his family in his hands. "Nothing remains of all these Princes," he says, "except one digit." He picks up a single hand. "Whose had was it?" he wonders. "The right or the left? The hand of a man or woman, of age or youth?" Putting down the bones, Orlando thinks of Thomas Browne, a writer and Doctor of Norwich, whose books greatly interest Orlando.

This passage is likely referring to Browne's book, Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial, or, a Discourse of the Sepulchral Urns lately found in Norfolk, *published in 1658, which focuses on burial and funeral practices over time. Orlando is obsessed with death and decay and spends much of his time in a crypt, which is reflected in the subjected matter of Browne's book.*

To Orlando, life is "not worth living anymore." Sasha is gone, and he will never see her again. He sobs for hours, and Mrs. Grimsditch worries in his absence that he has been "foully murdered." When he is through crying, Orlando opens one of Sir Thomas Browne's books and begins to read. The reader has probably guessed, the narrator says, that Orlando is "strangely compounded by many humours—of melancholy, of indolence, of passion, [and] of love of solitude." In short, "[Orlando is] a nobleman afflicted with a love of literature," and the "fatal nature of this disease is to substitute a phantom for reality."

Sir Thomas Browne's writing is known to be infused with his own depression and melancholy, which is reflected in Orlando's despair. Literature is both the cause of and the cure for Orlando's "disease." Orlando later finds immortality in writing; by writing and publishing a book, Orlando, in a way, lives forever.

"For once the disease of reading has laid hold upon the system," the narrator claims, "it weakens it so that it falls an easy prey to that other scourge which dwells in the ink pot and festers in the quill. The wretch takes to writing." In this sickly state, the narrator says, is where Orlando is. He would give his entire fortune to write a single book and "become famous," but "all the gold in Peru" cannot buy him "a well-turned line." As such, Orlando "falls into consumption and sickness, blows his brains out, turns his face to the wall."

Woolf is, of course, being sarcastic. Orlando doesn't kill himself, although he frequently feels like dying. Orlando longs to be a famous writer for most of the book, but by the end of the novel, Orlando begins to understand that fame is not important. The power of writing is in the act of creating, not in publishing and fame.

This "disease," of course, does not break Orlando "as it has broken many of his peers," the narrator writes, "but he is deeply smitten with it." In fact, by the time Orlando turns just 25, he has already written "some forty-seven plays, histories, romances, poems; some in prose, some in verse; some in French, some in Italian; all romantic, and all long." Unfortunately, Orlando knows that "to write, much more to publish," is "for a nobleman an inexpiable disgrace." Still, he removes a thin writing book with the title "**The Oak Tree**" from his cabinet, opens it, and with quill in hand, Orlando "pauses."

This is the first mention of Orlando's poem, "The Oak Tree," which is symbolic of Orlando's identity as a poet and of his evolution as a writer. Orlando's style changes greatly throughout the book and is usually a reflection of the times. Many poets of the time, such as Shakespeare, write romantic poems, or sonnets, so Orlando does the same here.

This pause is "of extreme significance," the narrator writes, and "it behooves us to ask why [Orlando] paused." Nature plays "many queer tricks upon us," the narrator says, "making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite, and stuffed them into a case, often the most incongruous." Nature has "further complicated" things, not only "by providing a perfect ragbag of odds and ends within us," but by "lightly stitching" the "whole assortment" together with "a single thread." The "seamstress," the narrator explains, is "Memory," and she is a "capricious one at that."

The narrator's language here reflects the same language used in Woolf's 1927 essay, "The New Biography," in which she claims the difficulty of biographical writing lies in the melding of hard facts (the "granite") with the intangibility of personality (the "rainbow"). As everyone is "a perfect ragbag" of such "odds and ends," a biography must capture both to be accurate.

"Memory runs her need in and out, up and down, hither and thither," the narrator asserts, and "the most ordinary movement in the world," such as sitting down to write, "may agitate a thousand odd, disconnected fragments, now bright, now dim, hanging and bobbing and dipping and flaunting." So as Orlando dips his quill, he begins to think again of Sasha—"why had she left him?" and "was she dead?"—and then his thoughts turn to "the face of that rather fat, shabby man" whom Orlando saw at the servants' table so many years before. Orlando knows that the man was not a nobleman. "A poet, I dare say," Orlando mutters.

This passage introduces Woolf's argument of the unreliability of memory and the nonlinear way in which she views time. Time is not a chronological thing that can be counted off and neatly kept. It jumps back and forth through one's memories, which are often fragmented and disordered. For example, Orlando's own memory jumps back and forth between thoughts of Sasha and years earlier when he saw the shabby poet—later implied to be Shakespeare—at his father's table.

"It is these pauses that are our undoing," the narrator writes. Orlando pauses again for a moment and begins to write with "Ambition." He will be "the first poet of his race and bring immortal lustre upon his name." He thinks of the family ancestors in the crypt and what might remain of them: "A skull; a finger." Orlando turns the pages of Sir Thomas Browne's book, and, suddenly, the answer comes to him. Orlando's ancestors and "their deeds" are nothing more than "dust and ashes," but Orlando "and his words" are "immortal."

In this passage, Woolf draws a clear parallel between immortality and writing. The book suggests that writing is an incredibly personal process, and to write and publish a book is to make a part of one's self live forever. Woolf argues that the importance of writing does not lie in fame necessarily but in the therapeutic effects of artistic expression. It does not matter how many people read one's writing, what matters is that it is created in the first place.

"Anyone moderately familiar with the rigours of composition will not need to be told the story in detail," the narrator says. Orlando writes, and it seems "good"; however, he reads the same and discovers it is "vile." He "corrects" and "tears up" papers and is sometimes "in ecstasy," other times "in despair." He "cries," "laughs," "vacillates between this style and that," and cannot decide if he is "the divinest genius or the greatest fool in the world." In such a whirlwind, Orlando decides to "break [his] solitude," and writes to a friend who is himself acquainted with many writers. Orlando is now convinced that he belongs "to the sacred race rather than to the noble." He is "by birth a writer, rather than an aristocrat."

Despite writing's therapeutic effects, it still causes Orlando a fair amount of distress, which Woolf is likely well acquainted with herself as a writer. The act of writing is often painful and halting. It is not easy by any means, and it can quickly fill a writer with crippling self-doubt. However, the passage implies that this is the mark of a true writer; thus, Orlando is convinced he belongs to "the sacred race"—that of poets—instead of his own aristocratic heritage, which implies that writing is central to Orlando's identity.

In the letter to his friend, Orlando asks to meet Mr. Nicholas Greene, "a very famous writer" and an acquaintance of his friend. Orlando tells his friend that if Nick Greene will consent to meet him, he will send a coach and team of horses to fetch him. To Orlando's complete surprise, Nick Greene agrees, and on April the 21st, he reaches Orlando's estate. When the famous writer arrives, Orlando is "slightly disappointed." Green is "not above average height" and is "lean" and somewhat "stooped." Despite being a poet, he is more apt to "scold than to flatter," more suited "to quarrel than to coo," and more likely "to hate than to love." Orlando is "taken aback" by this realization, but they go to dinner anyway.

Again, time is subjective, and Woolf only mentions the date because it is the day that Orlando meets one of his literary heroes. This also begins Woolf's argument that poets, even famous and accomplished ones, are just ordinary people. Orlando expects Greene to have a physical stature that reflects his reputation as a writer, but he is just an average guy, and is rather unpleasant besides. Orlando likewise expects Greene to be full of romantic language, but Greene is the exact opposite, suggesting there is nothing overly special about famous poets.

At dinner, Orlando and Nick Greene engage in small talk. Nick tells Orlando of his last name, and how some spell it with an "e," and others do not. Orlando tells Nick about his grandmother who milked cows, and then he finally asks Nick about poetry. Nick's eyes "flash fire" as he begins to tell Orlando all about "the nature of poetry." Compared to prose, it is "harder to sell," and it takes much longer to write. Nick's nerves have suffered on account of poetry, he tells Orlando, giving an account of his entire health history, including "the palsy, the gout, the ague, the dropsy, and three sorts of fever in succession." He has also suffered "an enlarged heart, a great spleen, and a distressed liver." But the worst, Nick claims, is his spine; it "burns like fire," and his brain often feels "like lead."

Like other poets Orlando meets in the novel, Greene says nothing witty or profound, and he speaks mostly of banalities. Orlando is under the impression that poets have the inside scoop regarding truth and the meaning of life and love, but Woolf implies they know as much as everyone else. Just as Orlando suffers with his writing, Greene offers a laundry list of ailments he connects with his own writing. In this vein, Woolf again implies that to create art always involves some sort of suffering, which is repeatedly referred to as a "disease" throughout the novel.

Greene tells Orlando that he has sold only 500 copies of his own poem. "But that of course is largely due to the conspiracy against me," Nick says. "All I can say," Nick concludes as he pounds the table, "is that the art of poetry is dead in England." Orlando is shocked. How can this be? Their time is one of great writers—of "Shakespeare, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Browne, [and] Donne"—how can poetry be dead? These poets are Orlando's heroes. Surely, Nick must be mistaken.

Greene's opinion of contemporary literature represents writers and critics who oppose new techniques in favor of more traditional approaches. During their time, Shakespeare and Marlowe's style and form was considered new and innovative, and Greene stubbornly believes that poetry must remain the same from era to era.

Nick laughs "sardonically." Sure, he claims, some of Shakespeare's plays are "well enough," but most of his scenes are taken from Marlowe. And Marlowe? What can really be said of a man who didn't live to see 30? "As for Browne," Nick says to Orlando, "he was for writing poetry and prose and people soon got tired of such conceits as that." John Donne is "a mountebank" who wraps up "his lack of meaning in hard words." Ben Jonson, however, is a friend of Nick's, and he never speaks "ill of his friends." The "great age of literature" was the Greeks, Nicks says, and the Elizabethans are "inferior in every respect."

Ben Jonson, a famous contemporary of Shakespeare's, was a classicist and greatly influenced by the Greeks and the rules of writing they laid out, which explains Greene's fondness for him. Shakespeare, on the other hand, famously refused to follow such rules set by writers from a different era, and Woolf rejects these established rules as well. She plays with form and style throughout the novel and doesn't conform to accepted conventions.

The ancient Greek writers, Nick says, "cherished a divine ambition" that he likes to call "La Gloire" (only he pronounces it "Glawr," so Orlando has no clue what he is talking about). Elizabethan poets don't have "Glawr," Nick claims, and they only write for money. Shakespeare is "the chief offender," he says. Nick can remember a time when he ran into Kit Marlowe and Shakespeare at a bar. Kit was quite drunk and was speaking very loudly. "Stap my vitals, Bill," Kit said to Shakespeare, "there's a great wave coming and you're on the top of it." Kit, of course, was "killed two nights later in a drunken brawl" and never saw how his prediction played out. "Poor foolish fellow," Nick says, "to go and say a thing like that. A great age, forsooth—the Elizabethan a great age!"

Throughout literary history, critics have been notoriously bad at projecting which literature will stand the test of time, and Greene is certainly wrong here. Woolf portrays Greene, the personification of a critic, as hypocritical and biased, which implies that critics' reviews are empty and meaningless. This further portrays Shakespeare and Marlowe, two great poets, as just ordinary guys in a bar. "Stap my vitals" was a popular expression in Restoration comedies, which basically means "stop my heart," as a show of surprise or disbelief.

"So, my dear Lord," Nick says to Orlando, we must "cherish the past and honour those writers—there are still a few of 'em—who take antiquity for their model and write, not for pay but for Glawr." Nick claims that if he had "a pension of three hundred pounds a year," he would "live for Glawr alone." He would do nothing by read Cicero and imitate his style. "That's what I call fine writing," Greene says. "That's what I call Glawr. But it's necessary to have a pension to do it."

Greene's reference to a yearly pension harkens to Woolf's 1928 essay, A Room of One's Own, *in which she claims that a woman needs a dedicated space and a personal income if she is to write and contribute to a canon that has traditionally been dominated by men. Here, Greene requires the same things to be able to adequately write, which again reflects Woolf's personal connection to the novel.*

All of this pleases Orlando to no end. He has "a power of mimicry" that can "bring the dead to life," and he can say the most wonderful things about books, "provided they were written three hundred years ago." Time passes and Greene stays on as Orlando's houseguest. Orlando has for him a "strange mixture of liking and contempt," but he readily admits that Nick is good company. Nick tells fabulous stories, and even the servants, "who despise him," enjoy listening to him. However, Nick isn't having such a good time and can't wait to get out. If he can't "somehow make his escape," he feels as if he will "be smothered alive" and will never write again.

This passage underscores Orlando's journey and growth as a poet. He is initially dependent on the style and form of the writers who came before him, and his poetry is completely unoriginal. However, as the book progresses, Orlando's style changes, and he ultimately discovers that it is better not to conform to established conventions, which reflects Woolf's overarching argument for new forms of literary expression.

Nick Greene soon tells Orlando that he must be on his way, and while Orlando is disappointed to see him go, he is also somewhat relived. As Nick departs, Orlando gives him one of his original plays, the *Death of Hercules*, to read and give his opinion. Nick seems hesitant and begins to mumble something about Glawr, until Orlando offers to pay him a quarterly pension. Nick agrees and returns home.

The Death of Hercules *represents Orlando's one attempt at original work, and Greene completely dismisses it. Greene only appreciates work that harkens to the classics, which Orlando's play evidently doesn't do, even though its title suggests classic subject matter.*

Back home, Nick finds himself in the perfect "atmosphere for writing," and he quickly pens "a very spirited satire" of a young Lord which is an obvious "roast" of Orlando. He even adds a few scenes of Orlando's play, the *Death of Hercules*, which Greene claims is "wordy and bombastic in the extreme." Word soon reaches Orlando of Greene's pamphlet (which is selling like hotcakes), and Orlando sends one of his servants to Norway to get him two of the best elk hounds that money can buy. "For," Orlando says. "I have done with men." The servant returns with two prime **dogs**, one male and one female, and Orlando immediately takes them to his room. "For," he says again, "I have done with men." Despite this, Orlando continues to pay Nick Greene's quarterly pension.

Even though Greene has crushed Orlando, he still respects Greene and admires him as poet, as evidenced by the fact that Orlando continues to pay his pension. Dogs again represent Orlando's connection to nature. In Orlando's experience, people largely disappoint him, and it is safer to put his emotions and efforts into dogs, who always reciprocate his affections. Both Woolf and Sackville-West were partial to dogs as well and had several throughout their lifetimes, which highlights both their connections to the novel.

Soon after Greene's visit, at the age of 30, Orlando takes to burning each of his "fifty-seven poetical works, only retaining "**The Oak Tree**," which is "his boyish dream and very short." He now puts his trust in only two things: "**dogs** and nature." Calling to his elkhounds, Orlando decides to take a walk in the park. He would consider himself happy if he never again had to talk to another poet or Princess, and so it is in this solitude that Orlando spends the next days, weeks, months, and even years. Sometimes, the narrator writes, "things remain much as they are for two or three hundred years or so, except for a little dust and a few cobwebs which one old woman can sweep up in half an hour."

Again, time is completely subjective in the novel. Nothing much happens in Orlando's life during this time, and he is consumed with depression and pain, so the biographer glosses over years as if they are minutes, or a "half an hour." Orlando does not burn "The Oak Tree" because it is central to his identity, and it is also very different from the rest of his writing, which is incredibly long and wordy. "The Oak Tree," by comparison, is simple and "boyish," almost childish, by comparison.

One might conclude, the narrator says, that it is easiest to say only that "'Time passed' (here the exact amount could be indicated in brackets) and nothing whatever happened." Still, while Time "makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality," it "has no such simple effect upon the mind of man." According to the narrator, the "extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation." Orlando's time now, having lived 30 years, seems to him "inordinately long," but in the "doing" is "inordinately short."

This is a reference to Woolf's 1927 novel, To the Lighthouse. The second part of the novel is called "Time Passes," and all the events that occur in the character's life are recorded in brackets, just as the narrator says here. This passage also underscores time's subjectivity. Time's effect on people has little to do with the clock, which, the novel suggests, is quite arbitrary.

Orlando spends much of the following months and years thinking about "love," "friendship," and "truth." He eats his breakfast "a man of thirty," and comes "home to dinner a man of fifty-five at least." At times, a week can add "a century to his age, others no more than three seconds," as, the narrator claims, the "task of estimating the length of human life (of the animals we presume not to speak) is beyond our capacity." One's thoughts, which are doubtless made up of both "brevity and diuturnity," seem "of prodigious length" but go by "like a flash." Alone in these "deserts of vast eternity," Orlando lives and thinks.

This passage also reflects the subjectivity of time, as it implies that actual years have little to do with one's age, and age is instead reflected through personal experiences, which often have little to do with time. Orlando's thoughts are at once fleeting and lasting, which serves to distort the passing of time. The phrase "deserts of vast eternity" is from a famous poem called "To his Coy Mistress," written by Andrew Marvell, an English poet from the 17th century.

One June day, Orlando's Memory flashes before his mind the image of Nick Greene. "I'll be blasted," Orlando cries, "if I ever write another word, or try to write another word to please Nick Green or the Muse. Bad, good or indifferent, I'll write, from this day forward, to please myself." Around this time, another thought strikes Orlando "like a bullet" and ambition drops "like a plummet." He looks to his vast and sprawling house. He will add to the estate. But it already extends over nine acres, so he decides instead to furnish it—all of it.

Orlando's realization that he must write for himself, not the critics, is one of Woolf's overarching arguments. Writing to please critics like Greene only causes Orlando pain and defeats the true purpose of writing. Orlando is happiest when he writes for himself and doesn't conform to the expectations of critics.

Orlando buys blankets and curtains, and then chairs and tables. He finds the perfect glasses and the best lace and cloth. He spends millions—about half his fortune—and when every room is done, he moves on to the garden. He plants flowers and shrubs, and even has birds and two bears imported, whose "surliness," Orlando is sure, hides their "trusty hearts." He soon discovers, however, that the finest beds mean nothing without people to sleep in them, so he invites all the local nobility and gentry to stay with him. Orlando's 365 bedrooms are soon full, and his guests pass each other on one of 52 staircases.

Knole, the estate belonging to Sackville-West's family, has 365 bedrooms, one for every day of the year. The detailed list Woolf supplies of the items Orlando buys for his estate come from an itemized list of the contents of Knole, described in Sackville-West's book, Knole and the Sackvilles. *The association to time is thus purely coincidental, although it fits nicely into Woolf's theme reoccurring theme of time.*

Orlando is sure to avoid writers and foreign women, and he often works on his poem, "**The Oak Tree**." By now, the poem has been scratched out and rewritten so many times, it is difficult to remember how it started. Orlando's writing style has changed "amazingly." He has "chastened" his "floridity" and "curbed" his "abundance." One day, while again working on his poem, the image of a strange woman passes his window. She appears again later that week, and then the next day, and Orlando decides to follow her.

The changes in Orlando's writing style represents the passing of time and the dawning of a new era—the novel is about to reveal that it is now some time during the 17th century. Orlando's language is becoming less complicated and lengthy, and he is beginning to say what he means instead of couching his thoughts in flowery language.

The woman, the Archduchess Harriet Griselda of Finster-Aarhorn and Scandop-Boom, stands over six feet tall, and she returns to visit Orlando many times. Suddenly, Orlando begins to feel the "beating of Love's wings," but then "a thousand memories" rush back and—"horror!" Love has "two faces," Orlando says, one is "white," and one is "black." His feelings for the Archduchess are black, and he knows immediately that is "Lust the vulture, not Love, the Bird of Paradise" that is beating its wings. He immediately sends the Archduchess away, but he continues to see her around town. Orlando concludes that his home is now "uninhabitable," and he asks King Charles to send him to Constantinople as an Ambassador.

King Charles reigned over England from 1629 to 1649, so it is clear that the action is set in the 17th century, even though the passing of time is usually imperceptible in the novel. The detail that Harriet is over six feet tall begins to hint that she is actually a man who is only pretending to be a woman to attract Orlando. The novel later claims that one's gender is often the exact opposite of what their clothes suggest, and this is certainly the case with the Archduchess/Archduke. Throughout the novel, Orlando consistently loves women—even when Orlando later becomes a woman—and he indeed seems incapable of loving the Archduchess in this passage, almost as if he senses the Archduchess's disguise.

CHAPTER 3

"It is, indeed, highly unfortunate, and much to be regretted that at this stage of Orlando's career," the narrator writes, "we have least information to go upon." It is known that Orlando fulfilled his duties as Ambassador with "admiration," and he was involved in highly important matters of state. However, a revolution broke out during this time, and a massive fire destroyed many of the papers of record. "We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain," the biographer says, "but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to make use of the imagination."

This also reflects the problem of biography and the subjectivity of truth. Absolute truth is rarely available and often must be "pieced together," especially in biographical writing when personal journals and diaries are often relied upon. This places much of history on shaky ground and implies that factual truth is not as solid as it appears to be.

During his time in Constantinople, Orlando spends most of his days engrossed in "papers of the highest importance" and is "kept busy, what with his wax and seals." Yet Orlando is "often depressed to such a pit of gloom" that he prefers to remain alone with his **dogs**. Despite this, rumors exist to this day of Orlando's life and the many men and women who "adored" him. He is so cherished in his post, in fact, he is awarded a Dukedom.

Orlando's dogs are never far from his side, and this again reflects his strong connection to nature, which is a central, and unchanging, component of Orlando's identity. The fact that men and women alike fall in love with Orlando continues to challenge popular stereotypes and expectations regarding sexuality and gender.

"Here we must pause," the narrator writes, "for we have reached a moment of great significance in [Orlando's] career." On the day Sir Adrian Scrope arrives with Orlando's patent of nobility, Orlando throws an ornate celebration but "again, details are lacking." From the personal diary of an English naval officer named Lieutenant Brigge, it is known that "people of all nationalities" gathered at Orlando's mansion for the celebration, and rumor had it that "some kind of miracle was to be performed."

As the narrator has already said, memory is "a capricious seamstress," yet this portion of Orlando's life relies on the memories of another, which again underscores the problem of biographical writing and the subjectivity of truth. This part of Orlando's life is how Brigge specifically remembers it, which might not be how it actually happened.

Penelope Hartopp, the daughter of a general, reports that the celebration was "ravishing," and "utterly beyond description." Orlando, she said, was "*at least*" six feet tall, and he had such legs! The local paper claims that at twelve o'clock precisely, Orlando appeared on the center balcony, lit by great torches, and addressed the crowed fluently in Turkish. Sir Adrian Scrope presented Orlando with "the Most Noble Order of the Bath" and pinned a star on his chest. Orlando placed the "golden circle of strawberry leaves" upon his head, and "the first disturbance began."

This passage also reflects the subjectivity of truth and the unreliability of memory. Penelope Hartopp claims Orlando is six feet tall, but the biographer narrating the book never describes him as such. Furthermore, the local paper claims he speaks Turkish, which the biographer also never claims—Orlando speaks French, not Turkish, yet the official record implies otherwise. This suggests that truth isn't quite as factual as one may think, further compounding the problem with biographies.

The people, expecting a miracle, begin to riot and attack, and Sir Adrian Scrope and a "squad of British **bluejackets**" have to calm them down. According to the Embassy, the celebration is over by 2 a.m., but a servant recalls seeing a figure "wrapped in a cloak or dressing gown" emerge on a balcony during the night and "passionately" embrace a woman of the "the peasant class."

Here, instead of gender, the clothing of the British officers reflects their authority. It is likely that if Sir Adrian's men were dressed in civilian clothes, they would not have been as effective in calming the crowd. In this way, clothing does more than simply represent one's gender.

"The next morning, the Duke, as we must now call him," the narrator writes, cannot be woken. When Orlando's sleep extends into the afternoon, a doctor is called. Papers are strewn about the "disordered" room, and many contain lines of poetry and mention of "an **oak tree**." Among the papers is also a marriage deed between Orlando and Rosina Pepita, a known "gipsy" dancer.

Presumably, the woman Orlando is seen embracing on the balcony is Rosina, and she is another reflection of Orlando's taste for "low company." As a Romani dancer, she is well below Orlando's social status as a Duke. (Here, Woolf uses the word "gispy," often spelled "gypsy," which is now considered a racial slur for the Romani people.) Orlando's poetry, another constant aspect of his identity, remains as well, even though he has obviously begun another transformation.

It perhaps would be easier, the narrator admits, to simply say "Orlando died and was buried." But the biographer cries, "No!" The biographer will have "the Truth and nothing but the Truth! […] THE TRUTH!" In this case, the Truth is that as Orlando wakes on this day, the morning of Thursday, May 10th, he is "a woman."

Obviously, Orlando's swift, sleep-induced transformation is completely unbelievable and has a magical quality to it, but it is nevertheless Orlando's "truth," which again reflects the subjectivity of truth and fact. The book again refers to Orlando's transformation as a type of death that paradoxically allows him—now, her—to continue living.

Orlando's new form is one of "the strength of a man and woman's grace," and as he walks to his bath, he does not display "any signs of discomposure." While it is true that Orlando has changed genders, he remains, the narrator declares, "precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity." He looks the same and has the same memories but "for convention's sake," the biographer notes, we must now "say 'her' for 'his,' and 'she' for 'he.'"

Just as the narrator later claims, Orlando has both masculine and feminine qualities. The fact that Orlando remains the same person as always also suggests that sexuality and gender are not the same thing. Orlando's attraction to women, which is part of her core identity, doesn't change even though she changes gender.

Orlando's transformation has "been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such as way that Orlando herself shows no surprise at it." Many would like to prove that Orlando has "always been a woman," or that she is not now a man, but the fact remains: "Orlando was a man till the age of thirty" and is now a woman and will remain that way. To this Orlando shows no "signs of perturbation," and she calls to her Seleuchi hound (the **dog** never left Orlando's side, even as she slept) and climbs on her horse. "Thus," the narrator writes, "the Ambassador of Great Britain at the Court of the Sultan left Constantinople."

This passage puts the social differences between men and women into rather harsh perspective. Orlando isn't allowed to keep her title (one that she has undoubtedly earned through services to the crown) now that she is a woman, and she is later stripped of her noble rank. This underscores the inequality of women in society, which Orlando is now in a unique position to critique as she has experience being treated as a man and as a woman.

Orlando rides for many days and nights until she arrives in the land of a "gipsy" tribe to which she had previously "allied herself." They happily accept her into their fold, and Orlando takes pleasure in "having no documents to seal, or sign, no flourishes to make, [and] no calls to pay." She helps the people milk their cows and herd their cattle. They look at Orlando as if she is one of their own, and her dark complexion and hair suggest that she could be. They even consider allowing her to marry, which would officially make her one of them.

Orlando's life with the Romani people reflects her grandmother's life, who was some sort of peasant, and Orlando easily adapts to their way of life. Orlando's marriage to Rosina and her previous contact with the Romani people suggests that there is much the reader doesn't know about Orlando's life, which again underscores the problem with biographies as Woolf see it. A subject can never be condensed into a single book.

One day, while staring at the sunset, Orlando cries: "How good to eat!" The narrator interjects parenthetically that "The gipsies have no word for 'beautiful.' This is the nearest." The Romani people laugh and don't understand why Orlando sits for hours staring at nature. They believe she is afflicted with "the English disease, a love of Nature," and that it affects her more than most. Rustum el Sadi, one of the members of the communtiy, suspects that Orlando's "God is nature," and he says as much. He shows her his hands mangled by cold and frostbite. "This," his says, "is what [your] God does to men."

Again, this passage underscores the subjectivity of truth. Orlando finds truth in nature and worships it like a god or religion, but the Romani people don't share this particular view of truth. Rustum is also the name of a mythological hero who is often seen as the Hercules of Persian mythology. This harkens to Orlando's play, the Death of Hercules, *and the book's overall connection to literature and writing.*

"But so beautiful," Orlando says to Rustum el Sadi, and he knows immediately that Orlando does not believe as the Romani people do. Rustum's opinion thrusts Orlando into deep thoughts about nature and whether it is "beautiful or cruel," and it makes "her long, as she has never longed before, for pen and ink." So, Orlando makes ink from berries and takes to writing in the small margins of "**The Oak Tree**." As she writes, the Romani people become increasingly "suspicious" of her. When she is near, they "cut their fingers" and "break their withys," and a "great rage" forms within them.

The difference of opinion between Orlando and the Romani people further underscores subjectivity in the novel. What Orlando considers beautiful, the Romani community considers violent and destructive, which again implies that truth is not accepted across the board. Woolf's representation of truth in Orlando *completely destabilizes typical understanding of truth and fact.*

Orlando begins to think that she shouldn't marry and settle down with the Romani people. One day, she tells them all about her family's estate and its 365 bedrooms that have been in her family "for four or five hundred years." The Romani people are pleasant but regard her as "a stranger" of "low birth or poverty." Rustum explains that his own family extends back some "two or three thousand years." They "had built the pyramids," and they weren't impressed by "the genealogy of Howards and Plantagenets," which to them is "no better and no worse than that of the Smiths and the Joneses."

The Howards and Plantagenets are famous royal English families. Two of Henry VIII's wives (Catherine Howard and Anne Boleyn) were Howards, and Richard III was a Plantagenet. These families can trace their lineage back to the 1100s, but that is still nothing compared to Rustum's family tree. The prestige Orlando finds in her aristocratic family is subjective, and it does not impress Rustum and the other members of the Romani community.

The Romani people think of Orlando as little more than "a vulgar upstart, an adventurer, a *nouveau riche*," and Orlando knows for sure that she can't stay with them. To be "once more an Ambassador seemed to her intolerable," but there is no ink or paper with the Romani community, neither is there "reverence for the Talbots, nor respect for a multiplicity of bedrooms," and that Orlando can't abide. She tells the Romani people that she will leave for England at once, and they are pleased since they have begun to "plot her death. Honour," they say, demands it since she does "not think as they do," but they "would have been sorry to cut her throat."

Nouveau riche *loosely translates to "new money," and Orlando finds this implication particularly insulting. Like Woolf, Orlando openly admits to snobbery, and the Romani people effectively strip Orlando of what, in her perspective, entitles her to such snobbery: the importance of her aristocratic heritage. The Talbots are another important English family, one which the Romani people have absolutely no knowledge or reverence of. Orlando's aristocratic heritage is part of her identity, like writing and poetry, and she therefore can't abandon it.*

CHAPTER 4

Orlando buys herself "a complete outfit of such **clothes**" as the women of the time and boards the *Enamored Lady*. Aboard the ship to England, she thinks for the first time about her sex. "Perhaps the Turkish trousers, which she had hitherto worn had done something to distract her thoughts," the narrator writes. There were surprisingly little differences between the "gipsy" men and women, and with the heavy skirts wrapped around her legs, Orlando is suddenly aware of "the penalties and the privileges of her position."

Gender differences are not a major part of Romani society (which Woolf refers to here with the word "gipsy," which is now considered a racial slur), so Orlando easily ignores them while living there, which again suggests that gender is a social construction. Gender, however, is a major part of English society, as evidenced by the ship's name, Enamored Lady. *Again, it is primarily clothing that draws attention to gender in society, and Orlando is acutely aware of these differences sitting in a dress.*

Orlando thinks of her "chastity" and how she must "preserve it." Chastity is, after all, what "the whole edifice of female government is based" upon. It is a "foundation stone," a woman's "jewel" and "centre piece." Women "run mad to protect it" and "die when ravished of it." Orlando, however, was a man for 30 years—she "has held a Queen" and "married Rosina Pepita"—so she has not had "a very great start about that." It takes Orlando the "entire length of the voyage to moralise out the meaning of her start, and so, at her own pace," the biographer writes, "we will follow her."

This makes the double standard between male and female expectations within society painfully obvious. Orlando never once worried about her chastity as a man and enjoyed several sexual relationships, but now, as a woman, she worries what her sexual history says about her morals. Woolf suggests nothing; if it meant nothing as a man, it should therefore mean nothing as a woman. But according to society, this is not the case, and Orlando must now come to terms with her past relationships.

Orlando thinks her "**skirts** are plaguey things." They are beautiful, no doubt, but what if she must jump overboard? She surely cannot swim in such a getup. "Therefore," Orlando says, "I should have to trust to the protection of a blue-jacket. Do I object to that? Now do I?" she asks herself. As the captain offers Orlando a slice of meat at the dinner table, she knows the answer, and "a delicious tremor" runs through her. "Which is the greater ecstasy," Orlando wonders, "the man's or the woman's?" Perhaps they are the same, she thinks. "No," she decides, "this is the most delicious (thanking the Captain but refusing) to refuse, and see him frown."

As a woman, Orlando is expected to be dependent upon men, which she doesn't initially believe she is capable of. She considers the female gender oppressive and "plaguey," like her heavy skirts, although she does enjoy the attention her new gender affords her. The passage implies that the captain would never pay her this much attention if she were still a man (even though she is largely the same person), which again reflects the role of clothing in the construction of gender.

"For nothing," Orlando says, "is more heavenly than to resist and to yield; to yield and to resist." She begins to think that she may jump overboard just to be saved, but then she remembers what she used to call women like that back when she was a young fellow "in the cockpit of the *Marie Rose*" and thinks better of it. "Lord! Lord!" Orlando cries, "must I begin to respect the opinion of the other sex, however monstrous I think it?" She decides that to wear a skirt means that she must be rescued. "I must!" she says.

Orlando's question of "the other sex" is ambiguous. It is unclear whether she is referring to the male or female gender, which suggests that she is not entirely one sex or the other, an idea that the novel will continue to flesh out. In this case, Orlando decides that it is her skirt—an artificial and constructed representation of gender—that signals that she is a woman and that she must be rescued.

From her time as a man, Orlando knows that women "must be obedient, chaste, scented and exquisitely appareled." Yet, judging by her short time as a woman, Orlando knows that women are not any of these things naturally. Living as a woman involves "the most tedious discipline," Orlando notes. Hairdressing alone takes an hour each morning, "looking in the looking-glass, another hour," and then "there's staying and lacing; there's washing and powdering; there's changing from silk to lace and from lace to paduasoy; and there's being chaste year in year out."

Each of these womanly expectations are constructed by society, and, Woolf implies, are therefore meaningless and ultimately unfair and oppressive. The standard Orlando is expected to live up to as a woman is totally unobtainable, and it leaves Orlando feeling overwhelmed and not good enough.

As Orlando lists the tedium of womanhood in her mind, she tosses her "foot impatiently," revealing "an inch or two of calf." A nearby sailor catches a glimpse of Orlando's leg and nearly trips face first onto the deck. She immediately decides to always keep her legs covered if the sight of them prompts such a spectacle. A shame, she thinks, to keep such beauty covered. "A pox on them!" Orlando cries of "the sacred responsibilities of womanhood."

This moment also reflects the oppressiveness of womanhood, as the way in which Orlando dresses is based upon the needs of men, not women. This, too, reflects the power of clothing to construct gender. Orlando's legs look exactly as they did when she was man, yet the sight of the same legs in a dress drives the sailor wild.

Orlando knows that once she returns to England, she will never again "crack a man over the head," or call him a liar, or "draw [her] sword" on him. She will never again "wear a coronet," and she won't be able to "sit among [her] peers" or "lead an army." All she will be able to do is "pour tea, and ask [her] lords how they like it." "D'you take sugar?" Orlando says out loud as if in practice. "D'you take cream?" She is suddenly "horrified" of the "low opinion" she is beginning to form "of the other sex, the manly, to which it had once been her pride to belong."

Here, Orlando explicitly identifies the male sex as the "other sex" that she is disappointed with. Her change of gender makes the sexism and misogyny that all women must endure in English society painfully obvious. Orlando can't do the things she has always done simply because she is now a woman and will only be allowed to served men.

"Heavens!" Orlando cries, "what fool [men] make of us—what fools we are!" She feels as if she doesn't belong to either sex, and she begins to "vacillate" between the two. Orlando is a man. Orlando is a woman. She knows "secrets" and "weaknesses" of both, but she is "not sure" which one she belongs to. "Ignorant and poor as we are compared with the other sex," Orlando says as she yawns and falls asleep, "still—they fall from the mast-head—"

Woolf implies that everyone "vacillates" between the sexes, and it is only their clothes that truly defines the difference. Despite this, Orlando seems to imply here that women are the superior sex. It is true, she claims, that men make fools out of women, but men clearly make fools of themselves when they fall all over beautiful women like the sailor does.

"Better is it," Orlando decides when she wakes, "to be clothed with poverty and ignorance, which are the dark **garments** of the female sex" if by doing so "one can more fully enjoy the most exalted raptures known to the human spirit, which are," she says, "contemplation, solitude, and love." Suddenly, Orlando cries out: "Praise God that I'm a woman!" Then she stops. "Love," she says once more. Orlando has always loved women, and now, though she is a woman, it is still women that she loves. She thinks of "what the poet says about truth and beauty" and begins to cry. "Permit me, Madam," the captain interrupts, pointing to land in the distance. "The cliffs of England, Ma'am." "Christ Jesus!" Orlando yells at the sight of her country.

Here, Woolf refers to the 1820 poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," by English Romantic poet John Keats. In the poem, Keats writes: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." This implies that Orlando finds truth in being a woman, although she still loves women, which is exceedingly problematic in the current era. Same-sex relationships aren't permitted at all, so while Orlando may find some truth in being a woman, she still must deny a large part of her identity to do so.

Orlando thinks of Sasha as she approaches England. "So good-bye and adieu to you, Ladies of Spain," she says sadly. Orlando thinks of the fabulous life she is sure to lead as a woman of high society, but she decides if it also means "conventionality," "slavery" and "deceit," she will not tolerate such a life. If she must "deny her love," "fetter her limbs," "purse her lips," and "restrain her tongue," then she will immediately return to the ship and set sail for the "gipsies."

Orlando's later marriage to Shel saves her from her list of intolerable concessions. She never promises to "Obey" Shel as marriage usually requires. Thus, Orlando's marriage to Shel does not make her a "slave," nor is their union "conventional" in the least. Orlando even questions the unconventionality of her marriage, and wonders if it can even be classified as such.

Orlando suddenly thinks of the shabby man she saw years earlier in the servants' dining room, and her hand absentmindedly goes to her bosom, where she keeps her poem, "**The Oak Tree**," "hidden safe." Her mind wanders to "the great lines of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, [and] Milton." The captain begins to point out important London architecture, such as St. Paul's Cathedral, the Tower of London, and Westminster Abbey. She notes that London itself has changed as well. The dirty and comparatively smaller city she left has been transformed into a "broad and orderly" city of wealth and beauty.

Woolf argues through the character of Orlando that change is "incessant," both within Orlando and society, and the length of Orlando's life serves to highlight the extensive changes society undergoes over the course of several eras. Despite the changes within society, however, Orlando is still reminded of poetry and poets, a concrete part of Orlando's identity that remains in the face of widespread change.

Near London Bridge, the streets are lined with people and coffee houses. Orlando wonders if these people are poets, and she asks the captain as much. Yes, he answers. It is not uncommon to see Mr. Addison, and there, he continues pointing at two men standing together, are Mr. Dryden and Mr. Pope. "Sad dogs," the captain says, by which Orlando assumes he means that the men are "papists." Orlando smiles. "Addison and Dryden and Pope," she repeats to herself like "an incantation."

Orlando deeply reveres poets, and this is reflected in the way she repeats their names like a chant. A "papist" is a derogatory word for a Catholic, and both Dryden and Pope were indeed Catholic. However, Pope was several years younger than Dryden (he was around the age of 10 when Dryden died), so it is unlikely they would have known each other.

Back in London, Orlando finds that she has become "a party to three major suits." The "chief charges against her" are that she is technically dead, technically a woman ("which amounts to the same thing"), and the three sons she allegedly fathered during her marriage to Rosina Pepita have declared their father dead and claimed his property. All of Orlando's estate have thus been "put in Chancery and her titles pronounced in abeyance" until the whole mess can be sorted out. At present, it is "uncertain whether she is dead or alive, man or woman, Duke or nonentity." Orlando is given permission to reside at her country house, "in a state of incognito or incognita as the case might turn out to be."

This further puts the inequality of women in English society into rather harsh perspective. The novel explicitly says that a woman has about as many rights as a corpse, which is to say they have very few. Orlando's gender shouldn't have any bearing on her right to own property or hold an official title, yet she isn't allowed any of these things and needs permission to live in her own house. Woolf's reference to Chancery may be a reference to Charles Dickens's Bleak House, in which property is held in much the same way by the courts.

Upon her arrival at the country house, Orlando is met by Mrs. Grimsditch, Mr. Dupper, and an overly excited **elk hound**, which nearly knocks her to the ground. "Milord! Milady! Milord! Milady!" Mrs. Grimsditch cries as Orlando kisses her cheeks. Later that evening, Mrs. Grimsditch and Mr. Dupper sit visiting. "If my Lord is a Lady now," Mrs. Grimsditch says, "I've never seen a lovelier one."

Mrs. Grimsditch and Mr. Dupper don't appear alarmed by Orlando's transformation at all, and they accept her new gender easily enough. Even Orlando's dog seems to know that she is essentially the same person.

Since Orlando's return, the "bones of her ancestors" have "lost something of their sanctity." Rustum el Sadi's words have caused her to look at things differently. "I am growing up," she thinks. "I am losing my illusions, perhaps to acquire new ones." Yet, for all of Orlando's "travels and adventures and profound thinkings and turnings this way and that," her "process of fabrication" has only just begun. "Change is incessant," the narrator writes, "What the future might bring, Heaven only knows."

Orlando's perception of truth is shifting, which further underscores the subjectivity of fact and truth. What Orlando used to readily accept as fact—that her aristocratic heritage and history is impressive and something to be proud of—is changing and taking on new "illusions" of truth and fact. The novel later claims one's identity is a mix of many different "selves," and Orlando, too, is beginning to discover this.

The next day, Orlando takes out "**The Oak Tree**" and begins to write. Suddenly, a shadow crosses the window, and Orlando "hastily" hides her poem. She looks out the window and immediately sees that the shadow is a "familiar" one, a "grotesque" one. It is the Archduchess Harriet Griselda, the very woman who had chased Orlando from London in the first place. "A plague on women," Orlando says of the Archduchess. "It was to escape this Maypole that I left England, and now—"

It seems that Orlando is more self-conscious about her writing and her intellect now that she is a woman. This, too, points to gender as a social construction. Society has told Orlando that as a woman, she can't also be intelligent and write, so she begins to hide her writing, usually in the bosom of her dress.

Suddenly, in the place in which the Archduchess stood not a moment before is "a tall gentleman in black." "La!" cries Orlando, "how you frighten me!" The Archduchess apologizes. "Gentle creature," she says, "forgive me for the deceit I have practiced on you!" The Archduchess—or the Archduke, as it turns out—is a man and has always been one. He had fallen hopelessly in love with a portrait of Orlando and that is why he disguised himself as a woman and moved to London. The Archduke recently heard of Orlando's transformation and came as fast as he could to confess his love for her. "If this is love," Orlando says to herself," there is something highly ridiculous about it."

Orlando does not view love in the traditional way, and neither did Woolf or Sackville-West. The idea of loving a man is "highly ridiculous" to Orlando, even now as a woman, and she isn't the least bit attracted to the Archduke. This—like the Archduke's disguise and attraction to Orlando—serves to disrupt popular stereotypes of gender and sexuality.

The Archduke falls to his knees and continues to confess his love for Orlando with "enormous" tears springing from his eyes. Orlando knows from her time as a man that "men cry as frequently and as unreasonably as women," but she also knows that she is supposed to be "shocked" by the Archduke's display of emotion, "and so, shocked she is," the narrator writes. The Archduke continues to visit Orlando at her country home most days of the week. "I adore you," he says to her frequently. Soon, Orlando is "at her wit's end" with the Archduke and is worried that she will have to marry him when she suddenly remembers the game, Fly Loo.

The Archduke's tears, and Orlando's response to them, underscores the power society has in dictating gender norms. Stereotypical masculinity dictates that men shouldn't cry. While Orlando knows this is nonsense, society tells her to be surprised by the Archduke's display of emotion, so she is. This also reflects how society influences one's actions. Orlando despises the Archduke, but she considers marrying him anyway because society expects her to do that as well.

Fly Loo is a game "at which great sums of money can be lost with very little expense of spirit." Three lumps of sugar are placed on a table and bets are taken as to which lump a fly will land. Orlando is hoping that boredom will drive the Archduke away, but he is an avid gambler and immediately takes to the game. Running out of options and patience, Orlando begins to cheat, hoping her dishonesty will drive the Archduke away. She sticks a dead fly to a lump of sugar and "deftly substitutes" it for another as the Archduke stares at the ceiling. "Loo Loo!" Orlando cries, but he doesn't notice her sleight of hand. Orlando continues to cheat, taking a small fortune from the Archduke, but he never notices her deceit.

The phrase "expense of spirit" is another indirect reference to William Shakespeare. In "Sonnet 129," Shakespeare writes: "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action." This reference, in addition to again drawing attention to Shakespeare, also implies that Orlando isn't ashamed of taking the Archduke's money, or of cheating and deceiving him. Spending the rest of her life as the Archduke's wife is unbearable, and Orlando will do anything to escape such a fate.

One day, Orlando cheats "so grossly" that the Archduke is finally discovers her trick. He stands up from the table, turns "scarlet," and begins to cry. He cares not about the money she has taken from him, he claims, but "to love a woman who cheats at play is impossible." Orlando laughs and the Archduke "curses." She laughs again and he "slams the door."

The Archduke's display of emotion again disrupts popular gender stereotypes. As a man in a society governed by rigid and traditional gender norms, the Archduke isn't supposed to show emotion, and Orlando's laughter draws attention to this. She essentially mocks him, and he leaves in anger.

"Heaven be praised!" Orlando cries. "I am alone." She walks across the room to her writing table. "Life and a lover," Orlando says out loud. She dips the quill into the ink and writes the same: "Life and a lover." Reading the words, Orlando "blushes" and rises to go to her room. "Life and a lover," she again says as she looks in the mirror. The pearls around her neck don't exactly match her outfit, so she dresses in "**taffeta**" and fixes her makeup. "Now," she says looking again in the mirror. "So dark, so bright, so hard, so soft, was she, so astonishingly seductive," the narrator writes, that Orlando knows immediately that she is "loveliness incarnate."

The fact that Orlando "blushes" as she writes the word "lover" again reflects society's understanding of gender. Society says that Orlando should be modest and reserved as a woman, so when she talks about a lover—thus gesturing to sex—she blushes as a sign of her inexperience and virtue. Orlando wants to appear more ladylike (since her virtue is a sham), so she puts on a dress. Woolf's language, "So dark, so bright, so hard, so soft," is a reference to "A Celebration of Charis," a poem written by Ben Jonson in 1640.

Orlando smiles the "involuntary smile" of women who know "their own beauty," and again says, "Life, a lover." She then turns "on her heel with extraordinary rapidity" and tears the pearls from her neck. She strips off her **taffeta** dress, stands "erect in her neat black silk knickerbockers of an ordinary nobleman," and rings the servants' bell. She has "urgent affairs" in London, she says, and within the hour she is off.

As Orlando removes her dress, she immediately becomes more masculine, and Woolf's language reflects this change. She stands "erect" and wears "knickerbockers" like a "nobleman."

The narrator pauses to draw the reader's attention "to one or two remarks which have slipped in here and there" during the narrative. "For example," the narrator says, "it may have been observed that Orlando hid her manuscript when interrupted," and now, as Orlando drives to London, it may be clear that she "starts" and "suppresses a cry when the horses gallop faster than she likes." Orlando has a new "modesty as to her writing" and "vanity of her person" that she did not possess before. Thus, the narrator writes, that there is no change in Orlando from man to woman is "ceasing to be altogether true."

Orlando begins to embody the traits society expects her to have as a woman, again drawing attention to Woolf's argument that gender is a social construction. Society expects that Orlando be easily startled and fearful now that she is a woman, so Orlando adopts those behaviors. Even though Orlando is changing, the core aspects of Orlando's identity, like her sexuality, never change.

According to the narrator, "the change of **clothes**" has "much to do with it." Clothes "change our view of the world and the world's view of us." This was perhaps most apparent in the captain's treatment of Orlando aboard the ship to England. He likely would have treated Orlando much different had she still worn long pants. "Thus," the narrator says, "there is much to support the view that it is the clothes that wear us and not we them."

The narrator suggests that Orlando doesn't wear a dress because she is a woman; Orlando is a woman because she wears a dress. The only changes in Orlando are those imposed by society and its expectations of gender, without these compulsory changes, Orlando would still be much the same person.

Now, the difference in Orlando can "be found even in her face," and not because she looks physically different. Indeed, Orlando looks much the same as she did as a man, but "there are certain changes." A man's hand is "free to seize his sword," whereas a woman "must use hers to keep the satins from slipping from her shoulders." A man "looks the world full in the face," but a woman "takes a sidelong glance at it." If men and women both wore "the same **clothes**," the narrator suspects, "it is possible that their outlook might be the same too."

Again, none of these "changes" are natural or based on who Orlando truly is. These "changes" are based on the expectations of society, not qualities innate to one's identity and self. A woman "takes a sidelong glance" at the world because the same world tells her she doesn't have the right to look it "full in the face" like a man.

To further complicate matters, the narrator notes, "the difference between the sexes is, happily, one of great profundity." **Clothes**, then, "are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath." In fact, "it was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex." According to the narrator, while the sexes are very different, "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."

This passage also disrupts popular gender stereotypes, and it lends insight into Woolf's nontraditional understanding of gender and sexuality. This vacillation between the sexes is seen not just in Orlando but in many other characters as well. There is fluidity between the genders, and no one is entirely one gender or the other.

It is "this mixture in her of man and woman" that gives Orlando's "conduct an unexpected turn," the narrator claims. It is curious that Orlando can dress in 10 minutes flat, and her **clothes** are at times "random" and "rather shabby." Still, she "has none of the formality of a man, or a man's love of power." She is "tender-hearted" and "detests household matters." Orlando prefers to work outside and knows more about crops than any man.

Orlando, too, is neither entirely a man nor a woman, and she embodies the qualities of both. She still dresses quickly (which did as a man, despite the elaborate dress of the 16th century) and defies the popular gender stereotypes.

Orlando can drink like a man, and has a love for "games of hazard," and she can dive "six horses at a gallop over London Bridge." However, the sight of someone in danger brings "on the most womanly palpitations," and she finds "mathematics intolerable" and believes that "to travel south is to travel downhill." At this point, whether Orlando is "most man or woman, it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided," the narrator writes.

Woolf continues to dismantle popular gender stereotypes through her wit and satire, which exposes these sexist assumptions as ridiculous. As a woman, Orlando is at once sensitive and daring, and she can't be put into one gender category or the other. In this way, Woolf implies that all people can embody these qualities, regardless of gender.

The next day, Orlando wakes to several invitations from "the greatest ladies in the land" who all desire "the honour of her acquaintance." Suddenly, Orlando is thrust "upon the waters of London society." A true account of society, in London or anywhere, the narrator notes, is surely impossible to any biographer or historian. "Only those who have little need of the truth, and no respect for it—the poets and the novelists—can be trusted do it, for this is one of the cases where the truth does not exist. Nothing exists," the narrator says, "The whole thing is a miasma—a mirage."

By claiming that a "true account" of society is "impossible" for biographers and historians, the novel again implies that all biographical and historical accounts have previously failed because they propagate, in a way, false truth. Poets and novelists, on the other hand, can more accurately describe society because they focus on subjective rather than objective fact, which the narrator claims, in this instant, is nonexistent.

Society during the reign of Queen Anne is certainly polished. The "graces are supreme," and no education is "complete" without "the science of deportment" and the "art of bowing and curtseying." Yet Orlando has "an absent mindedness" that makes her "clumsy," and she often thinks of poetry when she should be thinking of "**taffeta**." Her "stride" is "too much" for a woman and her gestures "abrupt." Additionally, she has "too much of that black humour which runs in the veins of all her race," the narrator writes.

Queen Anne only reigned over England from 1702 until 1714 and died before she was 50, so this is a rather narrow window of time. Woolf again implies that all poets—Orlando's "race"—suffer from melancholy, or depression. In early medicine, too much "black humor," or black bile, in the blood was thought to cause moroseness.

"What the devil is the matter with me?" Orlando asks her **spaniel**, Pippin, on "Tuesday, the 16th of June, 1712," as she bursts into tears. "I don't care if never meet another soul as long as I live," Orlando wails. She has had many lovers in her time, but life has "escaped her." She looks to her dog. "Is this what people call life?" she asks, falling into the deepest despair. Orlando is "determined" to "forswear society forever," when an invitation to attend a gathering at Lady R.'s arrives. Orlando immediately accepts, for "Lady R.'s reception room has the reputation of being the antechamber to the presence room of genius."

This passage showcases the "black humor" of which the narrator is speaking. Orlando is obviously depressed. She isolates herself and prefers the company of dogs, a symbol of her connection with nature. Orlando's idea of "life" and "a lover" are intricately connected, and she seems to think that she can't have one without the other.

Orlando thinks back to the "three honeyed words dropped into her ear" aboard the ship to England. "Addison, Dryden, Pope." Despite Orlando's awful experience with Nick Greene, "such names still exercise over her the most powerful fascination." Only the most accomplished members of intellectual society are admitted to Lady R.'s, and nothing is said to be uttered inside that is not "witty." When Orlando arrives, she sits near the back of the room "with a deep reverence in silence," and after three hours, she "curtseys profoundly" and leaves.

Orlando is hoping to meet poets like Addison, Dryden, and Pope at Lady R.'s; however, by this point, Dryden has been dead for over 10 years. This is another example of the many anachronisms within the novel, which underscore the unreliability of memory. Orlando's memory isn't exact, nor is it perfect, but it is, to Orlando at least, nevertheless true.

Orlando expected Lady R.'s guests to speak "the wittiest, the profoundest, the most interesting things in the world," but they say "nothing." The "truth" of the matter ("if we dare use such a word in such a connection," the narrator says), is "that all these groups of people lie under an enchantment." Lady R. is the "modern Sibyl" and "lays her guests under a spell." They all think themselves "witty" and "happy" and "profound," but this is an "illusion." The truth is that "no real happiness, no real wit, no real profundity are tolerated where the illusion prevails." To encounter such things would "destroy" said illusion.

In calling Lady R. a "modern Sibyl," Woolf is referring to Sibyl Colefax (1874-1950), a famous London socialite of Woolf's time. Here, Sibyl is a prophetic figure, like the Oracle of Delphi in ancient Greece, only Lady R. doesn't speak any truth. Instead she enchants her guests and gives them the "illusion" of truth, but, Woolf suggest, this is not real *truth, nor is their happiness or wit true either.*

On Orlando's third visit to Lady R.'s reception room, a "little gentleman" enters and Orlando does not at first catch his name. The intellectuals go on talking about nothing at all, and the "little gentleman" says three "witty" things in row ("these sayings are too well know to require repetition," the narrator interrupts, "and besides, they are all to be found in his published works."). "Mr. Pope," Lady R. says to the gentleman with "sarcastic fury" in her voice, "you are pleased to be witty." The entire room sits in uncomfortable silence for nearly 20 minutes, and then, as if suddenly dismissed, everyone begins to leave the room "one by one."

As a child, Alexander Pope suffered from tuberculosis of the spine, which stunted his growth and crippled his stature. He stood only four feet, six inches tall as an adult. Here, Pope shatters the illusion of wit and truth by actually being witty and speaking truth. Still, Woolf says, one can simply read one of Pope's poems (like The Rape of the Lock) to experience such wit. In other words, it is nothing new.

As doors "slam" and carriages are called, Orlando finds herself alone on the stairs with Mr. Pope and invites him to come home with her. He agrees, and as they drive the poorly lit streets of London, they find themselves alternately in the dark and light. In the darkness, Orlando begins feel "the most delicious balm" come over her. She is honored to be in the presence of Mr. Pope and counts herself "blessed." However, as the light comes around again, she curses herself. "What a foolish wretch I am!"

The poorly lit streets obscure the truth, which, Woolf suggests, is that there is nothing at all exceptional about Pope. In the dark, it is easier for Orlando to admire and worship him, but when Pope is exposed by the light, Orlando immediately knows that she has been duped and is, in fact, "foolish."

Suddenly, there is darkness, and Orlando's thoughts again change. "How noble his brow is," she thinks ("mistaking a hump on a cushion for Mr. Pope's forehead in the darkness"). "What a weight of genius lives in it!" she thinks. "Without genius we should be upset and undone. Most august, most lucid of beams—" Suddenly, they are in the light again, and Orlando realizes she is "apostrophizing" a hump in a cushion. "Wretched man," she thinks now, "how you have deceived me!" In the light, Mr. Pope is "plain," "ignoble," and "despicable." He is "deformed and weakly," and there is nothing in him to "venerate," only to "pity" and "despise."

Orlando is worshiping a pillow at this point, and she realizes this when she discovers she is "apostrophizing," which is speech directed at an inanimate object, a lump in a cushion. Pope deserves Orlando's reverence about as much as the cushion does, which is to say he is just an ordinary person, "plain" and "ignoble," who, to an aristocratic snob like Orlando, is not worthy of such praise.

"It is equally vain," Orlando thinks of Mr. Pope, "for you to think you can protect me, or for me to think I can worship you. The light of truth beats upon us without shadow, and the light of truth is damnable unbecoming to us both." While Mr. Pope is "at first disappointing," his presence at her house means other poets stop by as well, and Orlando begins to enjoy living "in the company of men of genius." Addison, Pope, and Swift are "fond of tea," and they also like "arbours" and "grottoes." Orlando keeps a book to write down all the witty things they say, but the book "remains empty."

Society assumes that, as a woman, Orlando needs to be protected, and that, as a man, Pope should protect her. Of course, Pope is only four feet, six inches, and isn't protecting anyone. Society also assumes, especially literary critics, that, because Pope, Addison, and Swift are famous writers, they should be revered. But through Orlando, Woolf implies that they are just ordinary men who aren't worthy of such envy and adoration.

Still, Orlando is content to pour tea for Mr. Pope, Mr. Addison, and Mr. Swift, and in the "Round Parlour" of her home, she hangs their pictures in a large circle. That way, Orlando claims, Mr. Pope cannot say "that Mr. Addison came before him, or the other way around." But Orlando soon learns that "their wit is all in their books," and she has "a positive hatred of tea." She discovers that the poets have a "high opinion" of themselves but a "low one" of others, and they "demand sympathy." One day, Mr. Pope asks Orlando to read a "rough [draft] of a certain famous line in the 'Characters of Women,'" and, "to cool her cheeks," she must go for a walk in the garden. The "little man's" words had "struck her," and she is glad to be alone.

By arranging the paintings of the poets in a circle, Orlando means to imply that they are all equally talented and she reveres them all the same, but Woolf is again referring to Sackville-West's family estate, Knole. According to Sackville-West's book, Knole and the Sackvilles, *there was a circular room in the mansion called the "Poet's Parlour," in which several portraits of famous poets were displayed, including Pope, Dryden, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke. These poets were the friends of Charles Sackville, one of Sackville-West's ancestors.*

Later that night, Orlando goes to her room and dresses in "the clothes she had worn as a young man of fashion." They are a bit out of style, but they still are a nice fit, and Orlando goes walking about Leicester Square. She enters a building and, in the direction of a young lady sitting in a chair, Orlando tips her hat "in the manner of a gallant paying his address to a lady." The woman, Nell is her name, looks to Orlando and, thinking she is a man, is filled with "appealing, hoping, trembling, [and] fearing." She stands and accepts Orlando's arm. ("Need we stress the point," the narrator asks, that Nell is "of the tribe which nightly burnishes their wares, and sets them in order on the common counter to wait the highest bidder?")

The fact that the clothes Orlando wore as a man still fit her as a woman again implies that she is fundamentally the same person. Woolf also suggests, since gender is a social construction, that Orlando can simply change her clothes and become a man in the eyes of others, which indeed she does easy enough. Nell, who is implied to be a prostitute (she "burnishes" her "wares" nightly), responds to Orlando as she would any man and potential customer. She hopes that Orlando will find her attractive and retain her services, but she is also afraid, which suggests that former male customers have treated her badly.

Nell takes Orlando to her room, but Orlando can "stand it no longer." She quickly removes her disguise, revealing herself as a woman. "Well, my dear," Nell says. "I'm by no means sorry to hear it. […] I'm not in the mood for the society of the other sex to-night. Indeed, I'm in the devil of a fix." Nell tells Orlando all about her life, and soon the other "poor creatures" she lives and works with befriend Orlando as well. They "elect her a member" of their society, and Orlando greatly enjoys their company.

The relationship between Nell and Orlando isn't sexual, nor are the relationships Orlando has with the other women in Nell's community. Their relationships are platonic and are based on communication. With this, Woolf implies that the most successful and meaningful relationships are between those of the same gender and aren't necessarily sexual in nature.

During this time, the narrator says, Orlando frequently changes "from one set of clothes to another." She appears as a Lord in town and "visits the courts" to listen in on her cases. She even "fights a duel" and serves as a captain on one of the King's ships. She flees "with a certain lady to the Low Countries where the lady's husband follows them," but most of all, Orlando is seen outside the windows of coffeehouses, listening. Once, she even stands for 30 minutes "watching three shadows on the blinds drinking tea together in a house in Bolt Court."

Orlando again vacillates between the sexes. She is both man and woman, so she lives as both through her clothing. Woolf also refers to Sackville-West here, who once ran away with a woman to France until both their husbands found them and forced them home. Poet Ben Jonson lived on Bolt Court in London, and Woolf implies that Orlando is watching his shadow here.

Back at home, Orlando watches a dark cloud form over London. She stands at her window as a clock in the distance strikes midnight and watches the "small cloud" grow and darken with "extraordinary speed." As the clock strikes the sixth stroke of the hour, the cloud moves north, and by the "ninth, tenth, and eleventh strokes," the cloud covers all of London. "With the twelfth stroke of midnight, the darkness is complete," the narrator writes. The 18th century is over, and the 19th century has begun.

Woolf openly and vehemently rejected the values and morals of the Victorian era (1837-1901). This was the era of Woolf's parents, and she disagreed with many of their views regarding gender, sexuality, and war. She found the era oppressive, restrictive, and particularly violent, and this poor opinion is represented here as the dark cloud that settles over London with the 19th century.

CHAPTER 5

Along with the cloud, "a change seems to have come over the climate of England," the narrator notes. It often rains, "in fitful gusts," and the sun rarely shines. When the sun does make an appearance, the clouds and the moist air "discolour" the "purples, oranges and reds" and turn them "dull." Colors are "less intense," and even the "white of the snow" is "muddied." Worse than that even, "damp" has begun to settle in every home. This dampness is "insidious" and "imperceptible," and it "swells the wood" and "rusts the iron."

This passage also represents Woolf's low opinion of the Victorian era. The oppressiveness of the age's values and moral are reflected in the change in weather and subsequent dullness of light and color. The Victorian era was notoriously stuffy and refined, so colors are no longer "intense," and even the snow is less brilliant, as if paled by the oppression of the age.

"Thus," the narrator writes, "stealthily, and imperceptibly, none marking the exact day or hour of the change," England is "altered," and nobody knows it. Homes now feel "chilly," and the furniture and walls are "covered" too. Coffee replaces liquor after dinner and fake flowers fill the vases. Everything is "completely altered," the narrator says. Because of the dampness, ivy now climbs every building, and no garden lacks a "maze." Men, too, feel "the chill in their hearts," and words of "love, birth and death are all swaddled in a variety of fine phrases." The sexes grow "further and further apart" and "no open conversation is tolerated." Even so, "evasions and concealments are sedulously practiced on both sides."

During the Victorian era, to speak of sex in any way, including talk of pregnancy or childbirth, was considered taboo. Pregnant women did not speak openly of their pregnancies or say the word "pregnant," and they often hid their pregnancies or avoided society all together. This prudishness was seen even in the decorating practices; all surfaces and "legs" of furniture were covered, reflecting the sexual modesty of society. Still, Woolf implies, those of the Victorian era were hypocrites. They were still having sex as much as before, they simply weren't talking about it.

"The life of the average woman," the narrator claims, is "a succession of childbirths." Women now typically marry young and have 18 children by age 30, for "twins abound." The damp has also leaked "into the inkpot," and "sentences swell, adjectives multiply, [and] lyrics become epics." Even Orlando, who tries to "pretend that the climate is the same," is forced to admit that things have changed. One day, while riding in her carriage, the sun makes one of its rare appearances, and, bathed in muted "sunbeams" near St. James' Park, Orlando sees a "vast" statue of Queen Victoria.

Here, Woolf further implies that 19th century is oppressive to women. With 18 children (which, incidentally, is evidence of a lot of sex that no one is talking about), women have little opportunity to do anything other than domestic matters. Woolf refers here to the period of Romanticism (1800-1850) in which poetry became particularly long and descriptive. But Woolf seems to imply that the worst part of the 19th century is Queen Victoria herself.

Orlando has "never, in all her life, seen anything at once so indecent, so hideous, and so monumental" as the statue of Queen Victoria. "Nothing," Orlando thinks to herself, "no wind, rain, sun, or thunder, could ever demolish that garish erection." Arriving at home, Orlando immediately rips the quilt from her bed and wraps herself in it. "I feel chilly," she says to the housekeeper, even though it is August. "So do we all, m'lady," the housekeeper answers.

Orlando shares Woolf's distaste for Queen Victoria, referring to her as "indecent," "hideous," and "garish." The oppressive prudishness of the era is personified in the Queen, and her likeness towers over London, which is becoming increasingly cold and damp. Orlando is cold even in August, the height of summer.

"But is it true, m'lady," the housekeeper asks Orlando, "that the Queen, bless her, is wearing a what d'you call it, a—" Orlando interrupts her. "A **crinoline**," she says. Why does "every modest woman" do her "best" to "deny" and "conceal" the fact that she is having a child, Orlando wonders? "The muffins is keepin' 'ot in the liberry," the housekeeper says as she exits the room. Orlando tries to decipher the "horrid Cockney phrase" of the housekeeper and looks around the room. Queen Elizabeth sat in this very room, and suddenly, Orlando springs to her feet.

The word "pregnant" is not allowed in polite society, so the housekeeper refers instead to the clothing typically worn during pregnancy. A crinoline is a structured petticoat under which women of the time could hide the fact that they were pregnant. The Queen is thus obviously pregnant, and she sets an example of hiding it, which Woolf implies is ridiculous. Everyone knows that she is pregnant—hence the housekeeper's knowledge—so it seems silly to pretend otherwise.

Orlando decides to buy **crinoline** and a bassinette the next day, although she "blushes" at the thought. "The spirit of the age" is "blowing," the narrator writes, even if it blows "a little unequally, the crinoline being blushed for before the husband, [Orlando's] ambiguous position must excuse her." In the meantime, Orlando picks up her poem, "**The Oak Tree**," and turns to the first page. It is dated 1586. She has been writing the poem for nearly 300 years now, and she can clearly see the changes in style. She had been "gloomy" and "in love with death," then "sprightly and satirical." She had written in prose and even tried drama. Still, with all these changes, Orlando has "remained," she believes, "fundamentally the same."

Orlando "blushes" because she is changing with the times. To buy crinoline and a bassinette implies sex, so Orlando acts as if embarrassed. The "spirit of the age" is telling Orlando to get married and have 18 children, and she so she purchases the material trappings of pregnancy although she doesn't yet have a husband. Even though Orlando is changing with the times, "The Oak Tree," the symbol of Orlando's identity as a poet, implies that Orlando hasn't changed at her "fundamental" core. She may be a woman, and she will soon be a wife and mother, but she is still the same person—a poet.

After all this time, Orlando has "the same brooding meditative temper, the same love of animals and nature, the same passion for the country and the seasons." The door to her room is suddenly thrown open, and the butler and housekeeper enter. Orlando tries to ignore them and write, but "no words" come. Just as she thinks it "impossible," her quill begins to move, writing the most "insipid verse" she has ever read. She writes without stopping until her "abrupt movements" knock the inkpot over, spilling ink over the page. The ink blots out the verse, "she hopes forever," and Orlando realizes that she cannot write.

Here, Woolf implies that the expectation of the age, that Orlando marry and have a large family, has a negative impact on Orlando's writing. She is initially unable to write, and when she finally does, it is dull and uninspired. She is happy when the ink blots out what she has written, which, along with Orlando's negative review of Victorian literature later in the book, reflects an overall distaste for 19th century literature.

Standing at the window, Orlando becomes aware "of an extraordinary tingling and vibration all over her," which seems to "concentrate in her hands; and then in one hand, and then in one finger of that hand." Orlando realizes that it is the "second finger on her left hand" that is tingling. She looks down at it, but the only thing she can see is the ring given to her by Queen Elizabeth. Orlando is "positively ashamed of the second finger of her left without in the least knowing why." She looks to the maid's left hand, and just as Orlando suspects, there is a plain gold band on the second finger.

Woolf is referring to marriage here, which is more evidence of the "spirit of the age." The finger that one would typically wear one's wedding ring on begins to "tingle" because Orlando isn't married. The age expects her to be married, and since she is not, she feels ashamed. Orlando hasn't felt this way in over 300 years, which further situates the notion of the importance of marriage as purely a 19th century construction.

It occurs to Orlando now that "the whole world is ringed with gold." Wedding rings are "everywhere" in jewelers' windows, and "couples" fill the streets. It is as if "some new discovery has been made about the race," Orlando notes. She doesn't know who made such a discovery, but it doesn't "seem to be Nature," since the animals still behave much the same way. "Could it be Queen Victoria?" Orlando wonders. Her finger hurts so badly she is forced to "buy one of those ugly bands and wear it like the rest." But Orlando's finger still plagues her, and she can't write. Her "case" proves, it seems, that writing is not done "with the fingers, but with the whole person."

Again, this marriage-obsessed society is an entirely new phenomenon to Orlando. Marriage has, of course, been around for a long time, but it wasn't pushed so hard and considered so important and expected for women until the 19th century, Woolf implies, and Orlando feels this mounting pressure. Most of nature doesn't feel the compulsive need to mate for life, so Orlando assumes that it must be because of Queen Victoria's influence.

Orlando soon realizes that there is nothing she can do but "yield completely and submissively to the spirit of the age, and take a husband." Whom, she doesn't know. "Life! A Lover!" Orlando cries, "not 'Life! A Husband!'" Orlando has always prided herself on her ability to adapt to the spirit of the age—the Elizabethan, and the Restoration, for example—but there is something in the "spirit of the nineteenth century" that is "antipathetic to [Orlando] in the extreme." She feels "dragged down by the weight of the **crinoline**" that she "submissively adopted." It is "heavier and more drab" than anything she has ever worn, and the skirts collect nothing but "damp leaves and straw."

Here, Woolf underscores how much power society has to shape and control one's actions and decisions. Orlando doesn't want to get married, and in over 300 years she has only been engaged once. Yet the "spirit of the age" makes her feel for the first time that she must *marry, and she must marry a man. Orlando doesn't want a man, and as such, she is having a very hard time adapting to the era. This difficulty is reflected in Woolf's language, as Orlando is "dragged down" by the crinoline, a symbol of the expectation that Orlando will be both a wife and a mother.*

"Everyone is mated except myself," Orlando says. "Such thoughts" have never "entered her head," but now they bear "her down inescapably." She decides to walk alone in the park, and as she steps onto the grass, she is taken by the beauty of nature around her. Suddenly, "some strange ecstasy" comes over her, and she "quickens her pace." She breaks into a run, stumbles, and breaks her ankle. She falls to the ground and lies there, unmoving. "I have found my mate," Orlando says. "It is the moor. I am nature's bride."

Orlando's escape to the park is further evidence of her connection to nature, which is an essential aspect of her identity. Woolf is also poking fun at Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights, in which the main character recalls her love of the moor she was born on in a feverish delirium. Woolf was greatly influenced by Brontë (she mentions her in the preface), and Orlando's run in the park is a sort of parody of Brontë's novel.

Orlando lies on the ground for many hours and nearly falls asleep, and then she begins to hear a horse's hoofs, like a "strange heart beating," in the distance. She sits up and sees "towering against the yellow-slashed sky of dawn," the figure of a man. "Madam," the man cries, "you're hurt!" Orlando stares. "I'm dead, Sir!" she says.

Orlando's time on the ground in the park is like a miniature version of one of her week-long sleeps during which she dies a bit, and then transforms and changes.

"A few minutes later," the narrator writes, "they become engaged." The next morning, Orlando learns that the man's name is Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire. "Mine is Orlando," she says dreamily. They had learned the night before "everything of any importance about each 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." For instance, "Shel" is a "soldier and a sailor" and is just waiting for "the gale" to blow "from the South-west" to set sail. "Oh! Shel, don't leave me!" Orlando cries. "I'm passionately in love with you."

Orlando and Shel's quick engagement is obviously satirical and is meant to be funny; however, Woolf does still imply that the really "important" things about someone are not the things society considers to be important, like one's job and wealth. Woolf implies that physical attraction, which is about the only thing that can be confirmed in "two seconds," is even more important in finding a meaningful and lasting relationship.

Suddenly, "an awful suspicion" rushes "simultaneously" into Orlando and Shel's minds, and they spring to their feet. "You're a woman, Shel!" Orlando cries. "You're a man, Orlando!" Shel cries. As abruptly as the realization comes, they settle back in their seats, and Orlando asks Shel where he will sail to. "For the Horn," he answers. When at sea, Shel's life is filled with "the most desperate and splendid of adventures." As he recounts them, Orlando lovingly stares at him. "I am a woman," she thinks, "a real woman." She thanks Shel for giving her "the rare and unexpected delight," and "had she not been lame in the left foot, she would have sat upon his knee."

Shel's effeminate personae makes him appear womanly to Orlando, and Orlando's masculine qualities makes her appear more manly to Shel. Neither Orlando nor Shel, presumably, have traditional notions about gender and sexuality. Orlando is attracted to women, not men, and Shel's feminine qualities are what attracts Orlando. Here, Orlando finally feels like "a woman," because the age tells her that to be a woman means she must also marry a man.

Orlando and Shel's days are spent in loving splendor. "Shel, my darling," Orlando says, "tell me…" but what he tells her makes little difference. "For it has come about, by the wise economy of nature," the narrator writes, "that our modern spirit can almost dispense with language." At times, "the most ordinary conversation is often the most poetic, and the most poetic is precisely that which cannot be written down." Because of this, the narrator leaves here "a great blank" space, "which must be taken to indicate that the space is filled to repletion." (This passage is accompanied by a large blank space.)

This passage refers to Laurence Sterne, whom Woolf also mentions in her preface. In Sterne's novel The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, *he leaves a blank page "filled to repletion," and Woolf is alluding to this by leaving a blank space to represent the very same thing.*

In the coming days, two Royal officers arrive with word of Orlando's lawsuits. "The lawsuits are settled," she excitedly tells Shel. She tells him that her Turkish marriage has been annulled. "I was ambassador in Constantinople, Shel," she says as an aside. The children have been declared illegitimate as well. "They said I had three sons by Pepita, a Spanish dancer," she explains. "Sex? Ah! What about sex?" Orlando reads. "My sex," she says, "is pronounced indisputably, and beyond a shadow of a doubt [...] Female."

Orlando isn't officially a woman until the courts pronounce her as such, which Woolf implies is ridiculous. Nothing changes in Orlando just because the court declares her a woman, and this again points to Woolf's central argument that gender is a social construction and that Orlando is still fundamentally the same person.

On October the 26th, Orlando sits outdoors listening to Shel recite Shelley, "whose entire works he had by heart," when a subtle wind begins to blow. A leaf blows softly over Orlando's foot, and Shel jumps to his feet. "The wind!" he cries, and they both run through the woods back to the house. The meet Mr. Dupper in the chapel and everyone from the estate gathers around. Mr. Dupper tells Shel and Orlando to "kneel down," but a "clap of thunder" obscures his voice. No one hears the word "Obey" spoken, but they see a golden ring "pass from hand to hand." Orlando and Shel stand to the sounds of organ music and walk out into a pouring rainstorm.

Percy Shelley was an English poet from the Romantic era, and here Woolf refers to his poem, "Ode to the West Wind," in which leaves blow about in a motivating and inspiring "wind." The omission of the word "Obey" from the wedding vows implies that Orlando—and perhaps Woolf herself—considers this vow oppressive. Orlando and Shel do, presumably, promise to love and honor one another, but not to obey, which would put them on unequal ground and place one beneath the other.

CHAPTER 6

Inside, Orlando stares at her inkpot. Her pen sits beside it, along with her manuscript. Just before the butler and the maid had interrupted her, she was about to say that "nothing changes," but "in the space of three seconds and a half, everything changed." She broke her ankle, fell in love, and married Shel. She even has the ring to prove it. With "superstitious reverence," Orlando spins the ring on her finger. "The wedding ring has to be put on the second finger of the left hand for it to be of any use at all," Orlando says, "like a child cautiously repeating its lesson."

Obviously, it hasn't been just "three and a half seconds" since Orlando was interrupted and decided to walk in the park, where she met Shel and decided to marry him. Woolf implies that is simply feels that way to Orlando, thus highlighting the subjectivity of time. Woolf also underscores how completely arbitrary marriage in the new age is. Which finger she wears a ring on, if she wears one at all, has no real bearing on her marriage.

Since her marriage to Shel, Orlando's finger hasn't tingled once, but she still has her "doubts" about her marriage. "If one's husband is always sailing round the Cape Horn, is it marriage?" she wonders. "If one likes him, is it marriage? If one likes other people, is it marriage? And finally, if one still wishes, more than anything else in the whole world, to write poetry, is it marriage?" Orlando isn't so sure. She takes her pen in hand. "Do I dare?" she thinks. "Hang it all!" Orlando yells out loud. "Here goes!"

Orlando worries that since her marriage doesn't look like a traditional marriage—her husband is often gone, and she still loves women—that it isn't a real marriage. Orlando also worries that since she is now a woman, she must surrender to a domestic life and stop writing. Orlando can't do that, and she feels like her marriage isn't real because of this.

Orlando begins to write about "grass" and "fritillaries" and "Egyptian girls," and then she stops and reads her work. "Grass," she thinks, "is all right," but "fritillaries" may be "a thought strong from a lady's pen, perhaps, but Wordsworth, no doubt, sanctions it." Orlando comes to the "Egyptian girls." "Are girls necessary?" she wonders. After all, she does have a husband at the Cape. "Ah, well, that'll do," Orlando thinks. Looking over her words, Orlando is overall pleased. She knows that she can write, so write she does.

William Wordsworth was an English poet whose Lyrical Ballads, *written with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, defined the poetry of the Romantic era. Here, Orlando writes in a distinctively Wordsworthian style, and she also hints at her attraction to women, but ultimately decides that her feminine and frequently absent husband will have to "do." Here, Orlando discovers that a married woman can still write regardless of society assumes, so she continues to write.*

"Done!" Orlando yells as she backs away from her manuscript sometime later. "And if I were dead, it would be just the same!" Looking down at the **poem**, Orlando knows that "it must be read." If not, it will surely "die in her bosom," so she sends at once for a carriage to take her to London. A servant tells her there is still time "to catch the eleven forty-five," and Orlando is reminded of the modern invention of the steam engine. In London, Orlando passes her old city house, which has been sold, "part to the Salvation Army, part to an umbrella factory." She passes Lady R.'s and thinks of the "wit" inside. "Oh! but Mr. Pope is dead," Orlando thinks sadly.

Orlando's comment that "if [she] were dead, it would be just the same" suggests the completion of her poem marks a type of transformation for Orlando, similar to her week-long sleeps that symbolize a small "dose" of death. Woolf also draws attention to the changes in society as well. Trains have been invented and revolutionized travel, Orlando's old house is an umbrella factory, and Alexander Pope has long since died.

Orlando walks the streets for hours, until she begins to feel hungry. She looks around and sees only the outline of an "elderly gentleman" in the distance. His shape looks "vaguely familiar," and Orlando is shocked to see "her very old friend, Nick Greene," walking slowly toward her. "The Lady Orlando!" he yells pleasantly. "Sir Nicholas!" she replies. It has been so long since they have seen each other, Orlando says, that he must, by now, be "a Knight and doubtless a dozen other fine things."

Ironically, the narrator refers to Nick Greene and Orlando's "friend." Greene is responsible for sending Orlando into a deep depression with the negative review he gave Orlando's original play; however, through Orlando's ability to seemingly forget Greene's review, Woolf implies that writers shouldn't take criticism so seriously.

Nick Greene laughs. Indeed, he is "a Knight," and "a Litt.D." and "Professor." He has written "a score of volumes." Plainly put, Nick Greene is "the most influential critic of the Victorian age." He takes Orlando to a "superb restaurant," and, placing his gloves on the table, he cries: "Ah! My dear lady, the great days of literature are over. Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson—those were the giants. Dryden, Pope, Addison—those were the heroes. All, all are dead now. And whom have they left us?" he asks. "Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle!" All the young writers, Nick says, "are in the pay of booksellers."

Litt.D. stands for Doctor of Letters, an academic degree that in many circles is considered more advanced than a Ph.D. All of Greene's credentials demand respect, but his critique of poetry in which he reveres those he previously condemned suggests that he has no idea what he is talking about. Greene is the personification of literary criticism, which Woolf implies is hypocritical nonsense.

"No, my dear lady," Nick Greene says to Orlando, "the great days are over." He says they live in "degenerate times" and that they must "cherish the past; honour those writers—there are still a few left of 'em—who take antiquity for their model and write, not for pay but—" Orlando interrupts. "Glawr!" she yells. Orlando smiles. Nick Greene "hasn't changed, for all his Knighthood," and Orlando is "unaccountably disappointed." For all these years, she had thought literature "something wild as the wind, hot as fire, swift as lightning," now, however, Orlando knows that literature is nothing more than "an elderly gentleman in a grey suit."

Greene is completely dismissive of new literary techniques, which is reflected in his preference for writers "who take antiquity for their model" and emulate the example set by classical writers. This also reflects Woolf's argument that people only change on the surface. Green's core opinion—that a writer must harken to antiquity to be any good—hasn't changed. All that has changed is what is considered "antiquity."

Suddenly, the bosom of Orlando's dress bursts open, and "**The Oak Tree**" falls to the table. "A manuscript!" Nick Greene exclaims. "Permit me to look at it." Orlando allows Greene to read her work, but this time, his assessment is much different. It reminds him, he says, "of Addison's *Cato*," and it has "no trace," he is "thankful to say, of the modern spirit." He claims it must "be published instantly." He talks of "royalties," "publishers," and "reviews," then leaves Orlando in a rush. With her poem gone, Orlando feels "a bare place in her breast." She has nothing to do but whatever she wants. "What then, is Life?" she asks.

Up until now, Orlando's "life" was her poem, but now that it is completed, she must find something else to do with all her time. Greene only likes Orlando's poem because it reminds him of Addison, whom Greene now considers a classic. Ironically, Addison's play, Cato, *is a tragedy, just like Orlando's play that Greene initially gave such a terrible review. Orlando's poem is not in keeping with the Romanticism of Victorian era poetry, so Greene instantly likes it.*

Orlando goes immediately to the nearest telegraph office and wires to Shel a cyphered message. They've invented a "language" that can relay messages of the "utmost complexity" with only a few words. "My God Shel," the message reads, "life literature Greene today—" and the last words, "Rattigan Glumphoboo," sum up the message "precisely." She knows she will not receive an answer for several hours, so she goes walking in the street.

This passage further reflects Woolf's assertion that some communication has very little to do with words. Orlando's telegram is completely nonsensical, but it makes perfect sense, presumably, to both Orlando and Shel. The fact that Orlando runs to wire Shel immediately after asking what life is suggests that Shel is now her life, especially in the absence of her poem.

Orlando comes across a book seller and goes inside. She has "known manuscripts" her entire life. She has held the "rough brown sheets" of Spenser and has seen both Shakespeare and Milton's "scripts." She owns many "quartos" and "folios," but books are something else entirely. The "innumerable little volumes" are stacked throughout the store. One can buy all of Shakespeare's works for only "half a crown," and she finds books written by Sir Nicolas as well. Orlando tells the bookseller to "send her everything of any importance," and walks out the door after buying a pile of books.

The differences in how Orlando reads over the centuries is further evidence of the society's sweeping changes. "Quartos" and "folios" describe early forms of printing. A quarto is a small book in which the page is twice folded to make four leaves, and a folio is a small book in which the page is folded once to make two leaves. Printing has progressed since then, and Orlando is in awe of the number of available titles.

With a stack of "critical journals," Orlando makes her way to the park. She reads an article by Sir Nicolas about John Donne, but the hustle and bustle of the park distracts her. "Life? Literature? One to be made into the other?" Orlando thinks. "But how monstrously difficult!" As Orlando reads Sir Nicolas, she begins to sense "an extremely uncomfortable feeling," that "one must never say what one thinks." As she continues to read, Orlando discovers that each of the critics make "one feel [...] that one must always, always write like someone else." Orlando slams the journal shut. She can never be "as spiteful as all that," she says. "So how can I be a critic and write the best English prose of my time?" Orlando asks. "Damn it all!" she yells.

Interestingly, despite numerous different choices, Orlando picks a critical journal, and one written by Greene at that, over every other book in the bookstore. It seems that Orlando is obsessed with what the critics say about writing, but Woolf implies that what the critics say doesn't matter. The critics attempt to tell others how to write, and they prefer that writers "write like someone else." In other words, the critics want writers to write like the writers of the past, but Woolf instead implies that new literary forms are needed.

Suddenly, Orlando cries out: "Ecstasy! Ecstasy! Where's the post office?" She must wire Shel immediately and tell him of her discovery. She has learned that "it is not articles by Nick Greene on John Donne" that matter; it is "something useless, sudden, violent; something that costs a life; red, blue, purple, a spirit; a splash; like those hyacinths," Orlando says passing a flower bed.

Ever since finishing her poem, Orlando's sense of time, or memory, is scattered, and this is reflected in Woolf's stream of consciousness writing style. She jumps from topic to topic, subject to subject, seemingly without a point. This suggests that writing helped to anchor Orlando in time, but now she is wildly afloat without purpose.

As Orlando walks in the front door of her house, she finds the entire foyer littered with packages. The bookseller has delivered her books, and "the whole of Victorian literature" is tied up neatly in grey packages. Being "accustomed to the little literature of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries," she is "appalled by the consequences of her order." Victorian literature means not "merely four great names separate and distinct but four great names sunk and embedded in a mass" of writers and books.

Woolf is openly critical of Victorian literature, claiming it is nothing but "four great names" stuck in with a bunch of others that aren't so great. Changes in printing have made publishing less expensive and labor intensive, so the market is saturated compared to previous eras. It is now easier to publish, and there are more choices than ever before.

"There are only two ways of coming to a conclusion upon Victorian literature," the narrator writes, "one is to write it out in sixty volumes octavo, the other is to squeeze it into six lines the length of this one." The "conclusion" Orlando comes to is that it is "very odd" that there are no dedications to noblemen at all, and that many of the writers have "family trees half as high as her own." She finds "that it would be impolitic in the extreme to wrap a ten-pound note round the sugar tongs when Miss Christina Rossetti came to tea."

An "octavo" in an early book, like a folio or quarto, only the page is folded eight times to make sixteen pages. Here, by claiming all of Victorian literature can be fit into both "sixty volumes octavo" and six short sentences, Woolf implies that Victorian literature is little more than fancy language that says very little. Christina Rossetti is a 19th century British poet whose father was a nobleman. Rossetti can't be writing for money, Orlando implies, despite what Greene says about contemporary poets.

Suddenly, Orlando comes to a final conclusion about Victorian literature, which is "of the highest importance but which, as we have already much overpassed our limit of six lines," the narrator writes, "we must omit."

With this passage, Woolf implies that there is nothing special about Victorian literature and that Orlando's final conclusion isn't even worth noting.

After coming to her conclusion, Orlando looks out the window for a long time. "For when anybody comes to a conclusion it is as if they have tossed the ball over the net and must wait for the unseen antagonist to return it," the narrator says. We can "only wish that" the biographer will "wrap up what now has to be told delicately, as a biographer should. But no!" Suddenly, it is March the 2nd. "Do you recognize the Green and in the middle the steeple?" the narrator asks. "Oh yes, it is Kew!" And then it is "March the 20th, at three o'clock in the morning," and the midwife hands Orlando a baby. "It's a very fine boy, M'Lady," she says.

This passage is another example of Woolf's stream of consciousness technique. She jumps randomly from subject to subject, without any connection, which is meant to reflect Orlando's highly subjective memories. The mention of "Kew" is a reference to Woolf's experimental short story, "Kew Gardens," and that experimental technique is seen here as well. Orlando has obviously given birth, but it is only mentioned in passing, as if it the memory has just popped into Orlando's mind.

Once again, Orlando stands at the window. "But let the reader take courage," the narrator says, "nothing of the same sort is going to happen today, which is not, by any means, the same day." As Orlando looks out the window, she notes that the weather is changing. Even the sky seems to change, for King Edward has succeeded Queen Victoria. Looking at the houses, Orlando watches as people light entire rooms with the flip of a switch. Water is "hot in two seconds," and the people are much happier. The ivy drops from houses and families are smaller.

King Edward VII was king of England from 1901 until 1910, which marks the end of Queen Victoria's reign, and Woolf portrays this as a positive change that coincides with a lifting of the dark and a dawning a new era. This is reflected literally through the invention of modern conveniences like electricity and water heaters, and all of England seems to begin to shake the damp that had previously pervaded the country.

Orlando can hear the clock ticking "louder and louder," until it strikes 10 a.m. on October 11th, 1928. It is the "present moment," the narrator says. Orlando turns "pale" and presses "her hand to her heart." There cannot be a more "terrifying revelation," the narrator says, "than that it is the present moment." Plus, Orlando is "terribly late," so she jumps in her "motor car" and starts it up. She drives to Marshall & Snelgrove's and goes inside. She looks at her shopping list: "boy's boots, bath salts, sardines." She looks around and gets into the elevator. "The fabric of life now," Orlando thinks as the elevator goes up, "is magic. [...] So my belief in magic returns."

This marks the climax of the novel. At this moment, Orlando realizes it is the "present moment," and the novel suggests this holds special significance. Orlando must now decide who and what she is. She can either commit to what society says she should be, a traditional wife and mother, or she can continue to be what she has always been—a poet. Orlando immediately runs errands, which suggests she has chosen a domestic route, but she still believes in "magic," or literature.

Orlando looks again to her shopping list and sees for the first time an additional item: "sheets for a double bed." She gets off the elevator and walks to a counter. "Sheets for a double bed," she says to the man behind the counter. The housekeeper informed her just the other day of the hole "in the bottom sheet in the royal bed." Many royals have slept there, Orlando thinks, "no wonder it had a hole in it." She repeats to the man behind the counter that she is in search of sheets, and he returns with "the best Irish linen."

Orlando's mental tangent upon seeing the sheets on her shopping list is reminiscent of Woolf's experimental short story "A Mark on the Wall," in which Woolf looks at a mark on her living room wall and thinks a series of random thoughts. Thinking about the hole in the sheet, Orlando is thrown into similar random thoughts that go on for some time.

"Faithless!" Orlando cries as the man disappears and the shop begins to "pitch and toss." Suddenly, there is "yellow water" and she can see a Russian ship in the distance. "Oh, Sasha!" Orlando yells to the "fat" and "lethargic" woman her love has become. "Any napkins, towels, dusters to-day, Ma'am?" the man behind the counter asks again. Orlando looks to her shopping list and is "able to reply with every appearance of composure." No, she says, only "bath salts," and that is on another floor.

Orlando almost seems to hallucinate here, but it is only her random, and incredibly vivid, memory, which has caused her to think of Sasha, one of the lost loves of her life. Orlando still deeply loves women even though she is no longer a man, but society has restricted whom she can openly love. So, Orlando marries a feminine man and thinks of the women she has loved.

Orlando again gets on the elevator and rides to another floor. She steps out and is lost among the handbags. She stands "hesitating," trying to "collect" herself. "Time has passed over me," she says finally, "This is the oncome of middle age. How strange it is! Nothing is any longer one thing. I take up a handbag and I think of an old bumboat woman frozen in the ice." She turns and walks out in the direction of her car.

Orlando's comment that "nothing is any longer one thing," again points to the subjectivity of Orlando's thoughts and memories. This surreal haze of memories and thoughts is Orlando's reality, regardless of how strange or unbelievable it may seem, and this again is reflected through Woolf's stream of consciousness style.

"It cannot be denied," the narrator writes, "that the most successful practitioners of the art of life, often unknown people by the way, somehow contrive to synchronize the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison, and the present is neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten in the past." It is easy to say that one only lives the years "allotted them on a tombstone," but the dead walk among us, and those not yet born "go through the forms of life." Some are hundreds of years old but consider themselves 36. "The true length of a person's life, whatever the *Dictionary of National Biography* may say," the narrator claims, "is always a matter of dispute."

This harkens back to the climax and why Orlando pauses and grabs her heart. Orlando is a unique mixture of every experience she has had until now, and she must find a way to incorporate that experience into her modern life. Woolf's mention of the DNB, *which represents traditional forms of biography, focuses only on factual truth, like the number of years lived. Woolf instead implies that "the true length of a person's life" is much more subjective.*

"Confound it all!" Orlando says as she drives down the street. "Look where you're going!" She drives down old Kent Road on "Thursday, the eleventh of October, 1928," among the shopping women and playing children. She soon comes upon "a cottage, a farmyard and four cows, all precisely life-size." She parks the car and gets out, calling "hesitantly," suspecting that the person she is looking for isn't there. "Orlando?" Orlando calls out. "Orlando?" she calls again, but no one answers.

Here, Orlando is looking for her "true self," or the one part of herself that identifies her and makes her who she is. But no one answers the call, which suggests that Orlando isn't merely one thing, like a mother, wife, or poet. Orlando seems to suspect this is true as she hesitates before calling out to herself, and she indeed gets no answer.

"All right then," Orlando says. She has "a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person my have as many thousand," the narrator says. Orlando can call on herself as a boy, or when she handed Queen Elizabeth the rose water. She can call on herself from the "gipsies," or the Orlando who married Shel. Perhaps it is "the one she needs most kept aloof, for she is, to hear her talk, changing her selves as quickly as she drives," the narrator claims.

It is not entirely clear which "self" Orlando "needs most," or which life she wants to lead from now on. It would perhaps be easiest if the self that answered was Orlando the mother, or Orland the wife; however, to commit fully to any one "self" would deny crucial aspects of her identity, like Orlando the poet, or Orlando the man. She is all these things, Woolf suggests, and can't be reduced to just one.

"The conscious self, which is the uppermost, and has the power to desire, wishes to be nothing but one self," the narrator argues. "This is what some people call the true self." As Orlando drives, she is looking for this specific self. "What then? Who then?" Orlando asks. "A woman. Yes, but a million other things as well. A snob am I? […] Greedy, luxurious, vicious? Am I? […] Spoilt? Perhaps." She watches the passing trees. "Trees," she says, "I love trees," and "sheep **dogs**." Orlando continues. "And the night. But people? […] Peasants I like. I understand crops."

Orlando's question as to whether she is "a snob" again harkens to what will eventually become Woolf's 1936 essay "Am I a Snob?" Woolf openly admitted but still struggled with the realizations Orlando is now having. She is "greedy" and expects "luxury." She is sarcastic and a bit mean, but she is also tender and loves nature and dogs. Despite this love of luxury, Orlando still prefers "peasants," or "low company" to other aristocrats.

"Fame!" Orlando says and laughs. "Fame! Seven editions. A prize." (Here, the narrator says, Orlando alludes to "**The Oak Tree**," which she had won a prize for. The narrator also takes a moment to acknowledge "how discomposing it is for her biographer that this culmination and peroration should be dashed from us on a laugh casually like this," but when writing "of a woman, everything is out of place.") Orlando claims she is "a poet" and "a charlatan, both every morning as regularly as the post comes in."

Orlando spends much of the novel chasing after fame and famous poets, but when she finally achieves this herself, the biographer glosses over it. Orlando's highly subjective memories do not focus on fame, which implies that publication, prizes, and fame don't matter after all. Orlando is a poet whether she is famous or not, and she still doubts herself (she claims to be "a charlatan," or a fraud, as sure as she is "a poet"), even though her poetry is popular and has won a prize.

Orlando begins to hum and "another self comes in." She stops and stares at the hood of the car. He was in the servants' dining room, she remembers of the shabby man, "with a dirty ruff on…Was it old Mr. Baker come to measure the timber? Or was it Sh—p—re?" When speaking the names of those we "deeply" revere, the narrator says, "we never speak them whole." Now, just as Orlando stops calling "Orlando," the Orlando that she has been trying to call comes "of its own accord." It is her "real self," and she falls quiet.

This is Orlando's self that identifies with being a poet, as her thoughts immediately flash back to the day on which she saw the shabby man sitting at the table, and she begins to understand the man was Shakespeare. This again implies that Orlando's identity as a poet is central to her core, and is her "true," or "real self."

Orlando drives up the winding road between the trees and deer appear from the woods. She feels "the greatest satisfaction" and is soon driving up to the house where she has spent "so may hundred years." Alone, Orlando goes to her room and swaps her **skirt** for "a pair of whipcord breeches, and leather jacket" in "less than three minutes." She walks past the dining room and sees "her old friends" Dryden, Pope, Swift, and Addison. "Here's the prize winner!" they say. She makes herself a sandwich and drinks a glass of wine and walks to the drawing rooms.

Orlando feels "the greatest satisfaction" as she drives through the nature leading up to her aristocratic home, both of which she also considers part of her core identity, or "real self." Orlando's skirt, however, the symbol of society's artificial idea of gender and femininity, is not central to her "real self," so she immediately takes it off. Now that Orlando has lost her illusions of fame, she easily walks past the memory of the famous poets who once held such allure.

Orlando calls to "her troop of **dogs**" and walks to the gallery. There, rows of chairs of faded velvet line the walls, and Orlando feels "gloomy" as she sits in the Queen's chair. The house is "no longer hers entirely" but belongs "to time now; to history." The whole house is bare. "Chairs and beds are empty; tankards or silver and gold are locked in glass cases. The great wings of silence beat up and down" the halls. Orlando thinks of the past and the rooms full of laughing people, and like "thunder," a clock strikes four.

The presence of Orlando's dogs as she discovers who she is implies their importance in her life. As a symbol of nature, Orlando's dogs are never far from her side, and they are with her now as her random memories make her nostalgic. The old house will never be the same in a new age, and Orlando mourns this loss. The striking clock reflects the mounting tension as Orlando moves toward a resolution.

All at once, the gallery "falls to powder," and "an explosion of gunpowder" lights Orlando's face. She sees everything with "extreme distinctness," but unlike when the clock struck in London, she has "complete composure." She calls her **dogs** and goes down to the garden, where the "intricacy" of the flowers and trees are all around her. Orlando walks "briskly" out of the garden and into the park, where she stops to watch the gardener "fashion a cart wheel." As she watches, she notices that the thumb of the man's right hand is missing a nail, and she is "repulsed."

Orlando's own subjective thoughts are again her reality as the ticking clock causes an explosion in her mind. She knows her realization is coming, and her "composure" suggests that she is secure and confident in who she is. But Orlando's thoughts are still mostly random as she stops and stares at the gardener and is distracted by the deformity of his hand. Again, Woolf's writing here is highly subjective, as is Orlando's reality.

Orlando follows a path, which leads "higher and higher to the **oak tree**" at the top. The oak tree is "bigger, sturdier, and more knotted" than when "she had known it, somewhere about the year 1588. She throws herself at the ground beneath the tree, and her poem, "The Oak Tree," flies from the breast of her jacket. "I should have brought a trowel," Orlando says. It is shallow over the roots, she notices, and she won't be able to bury the book here. Instead, she places the "unburied and disheveled" book on the ground beneath the tree and turns to leave.

The oak tree at the top of the garden path is the physical representation of Orlando's poem, "The Oak Tree." The oak tree has been around for as long as Orlando's poem, and like the poem, has gone through many changes and is hardly recognizable. Orlando wants to bury her poem at the base of the tree as a way of giving it back to nature, which has been so central and inspirational in her life.

The ground shakes and "heaps itself," and the mountains of Turkey appear. "What is your antiquity and your race, and your possessions compared with all this?" Orlando hears Rustum ask. Suddenly, the clock strikes and the Turkish landscape "collapses and falls." Orlando isn't sure of the time, but it is night. "Ecstasy!" Orlando cries, "ecstasy!" The wind stops and she sees "waves rippling peacefully in the moonlight." She begins to cry. "Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine!" she yells, and the name "falls out of the sky" like a "feather."

Rustum's question reminds Orlando of the subjective and arbitrary nature of finding importance in her aristocratic heritage. Nature is much more impressive and more important that noble rank and wealth, Woolf implies. Orlando's vision of Shel in the airplane implies that Shel is part of Orlando's "real self," too. She loves Shel, even though their relationship and marriage isn't traditional. It is her subjective reality; thus, it is a "real" marriage.

Shel is coming, Orlando thinks, he always comes when the water is calm. The first stroke of midnight sounds, and "the cold breeze of the present" blows across Orlando's face. She looks to the sky, seeing an airplane above, and she knows Shel is onboard. "Here! Shel, here!" Orlando yells "baring her breast to the moon." Just then, Shel jumps from the airplane, and springing up over his head is "a single wild bird." "It is the goose!" Orlando yells. "The wild goose..." and then "the twelfth stroke of midnight" sounds, on "Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-eight."

Shel's entrance into Orlando's subjective reality again implies his importance and connection to her "true self." Orlando has largely avoided people until now, preferring dogs instead. In Orlando's experience, people only disappoint her, but she has finally found love in her strange marriage to Shel. The "wild goose" behind Shel is another symbol of nature, like Orlando's dogs, which suggests that Shel will not disappoint Orlando in the way other people have.

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