Modernism and Time in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography*

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

This thesis examines modernism and time in Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando: A Biography*. The novel was first published in 1928 and it is the story of a noble youth from the sixteenth century who changes sex and turns out as a thirty-six year old woman in the twentieth century. *Orlando* is a mock biography making fun of the conventions of biographical and historical writing. The novel is sometimes dismissed as a diversion from Woolf's more serious work but it is my aim in this thesis to show that, although light in tone, *Orlando* provides great material for a serious study of biography, history writing, and modernist conception of time.

After the introduction I present Virginia Woolf as an author and the reception of *Orlando*. The background of this study consists of examining time in relation to modernism and modernity. Modernization and the technological advancement greatly affected the way people experienced time. The main focus of Chapter Two is on this new experience of time. After presenting the effects of modernization to the everyday life of people I move on to discuss the ways these changes influenced the modernist novel. Chapter Two ends with a discussion of Virginia Woolf's writing practise and the ways she manipulated time in her novels.

Chapter Three presents an analysis of time as a theme in *Orlando*. The first section deals with the role of historical time, memory, and identity in the novel. In this novel, Woolf is making fun of the conventions of biographies but also making a serious point of the restrictions of historical writing. Finally, the second section of the analysis considers Julia Kristeva's theory of "Women's Time" and shows how her theory can be adapted to provide a reading of Woolf's *Orlando*.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis I present the conclusions of my study and I also discuss possible topics for further study.

Avainsanat – Keywords

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, Modernism, Time, Julia Kristeva, Women's Time

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Pro gradu-tutkielmassani tutkin Virginia Woolfin romaania *Orlando*. Romaani on julkaistu vuonna 1928 ja sen päähenkilö on kirjan alussa 1500-luvun nuori aatelismies. Tarinan edetessä päähenkilö Orlando elää vuosisatoja ja tarinan päättyessä 1920-luvulle hän on 36-vuotias nainen. Romaani on kirjoitettu elämäkerran muotoon ja sen tyyli asettaa historiankirjoituksen ja elämäkertakirjallisuuden luotettavuuden kyseenalaiseksi. Teosta on toisinaan pidetty sekä tyyliltään että sisällöltään kevyenä, mutta tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on osoittaa, että *Orlando* on erinomainen lähde modernistisen aikakäsityksen tutkimiseen.

Johdanto-osassa esittelen Virginia Woolfin kirjailijana sekä *Orlando*n saaman vastaanoton. Tutkielmani taustaosa koostuu ajan ongelmasta modernismissa. Maailman muuttuminen modernimmaksi ja siihen liittyvä teknologinen kehitys vaikuttivat vahvasti ihmisten aikakäsitykseen. Tutkielman toinen luku keskittyy tämän uuden aikakäsityksen tutkimiseen. Luvun ensimmäinen osa kuvaa modernisaation ja uusien aikaa koskevien teorioiden vaikutusta ihmisten jokapäiväiseen elämään, minkä jälkeen siirryn käsittelemään modernistisen kirjallisuuden aikakäsitystä. Luvun kolmas ja viimeinen osa käsittelee Virginia Woolfin tapaa käsitellä aikaa teoksissaan.

Tutkielman analyysiosa tarkastelee ajan teemaa Woolfin romaanissa *Orlando*. Ensimmäinen osa tutkii romaanin tapoja käsitellä historiallista aikaa, muistia ja identiteettiä. Analyysin toinen osa esittelee Julia Kristevan teorian Naisten ajasta ja tarkastelee *Orlando*a tämän teorian puitteissa.

Tutkielman viimeisessä luvussa teen lyhyen yhteenvedon ja esitän mahdollisia tulevia tutkimuksellisia näkökulmia.

Avainsanat – Keywords

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, Modernismi, Aika, Julia Kristeva, Naisten aika

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1. Introduction

1.1. Aims and Structure

In this thesis I will study Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (later referred to as *Orlando*). The novel was first published in 1928. While it is written in the form of a biography, it is obviously not a real one: it is the story of a noble youth from the sixteenth century who changes sex and turns out as a thirty-six year old woman in the twentieth century. *Orlando* is a mock biography making fun of the conventions of biographical and historical writing. Its parody-like qualities include "Preface" and "Acknowledgements" and even a "List of Names" at the back of the book (Bowlby, Introduction xii). *Orlando* is dedicated to Virginia Woolf's good friend and lover Vita Sackville-West, whose life, family history and house inspired Woolf in writing *Orlando*. Vita's son Nigel Nicholson has called *Orlando* "the longest and most charming love-letter in literature" (Bowlby, Introduction xviii). Woolf herself refers to *Orlando* in her diaries as "wild," "satiric," and "fantasy," and she expresses a need to write something less serious than her earlier work (Bowlby, Introduction xiii-xiv). While *Orlando* can be read as a light-hearted comedy, Rachel Bowlby points out that "the very playfulness of fantasy [can], sometimes, be a way of saying the most serious things" (Introduction xvi). It is my aim to argue in this thesis that one of the "serious things" of the novel is time: my reading will show that *Orlando* offers great material for studying modernism and particularly the preoccupation with time that was central to the modernist writers.

To achieve this aim, the second chapter of this thesis examines time in relation to modernism and modernity. To begin with, I will briefly discuss modernity and the ways it affected modernism. Morag Shiach points out that while the writers themselves felt the

need to be modern, 'modernism' is a critical construct created after the Second World War (2-3). As with any other movement, it is difficult to determine when modernism begun and when it ended. J.A. Cuddon points out that movements "do not just start and stop; the evolution is gradual. The impetus of one diminishes (but continues) as the momentum of another burgeons" (551). Since the focus of this study is on literature written in English during the first half of the twentieth century, it is useful to define modernism as a period roughly from the 1890s to 1940s. Peter Faulkner writes that "[a]ccepting one's place, loyalty to authority, unquestioning obedience, began to break down; patriotism, doing one's duty, even Christianity, seemed questionable ideals. Man's understanding of himself was changing" (14). All this took place because new theories were introduced in science and philosophy. Society was also changing; new technology was rapidly changing the world to a more complex one than it had been before (Faulkner 14). The First World War destroyed the old feeling of security and left the people with a sense of fragmentation, uncertainty and constant threat. Modernization and the technological advancement greatly affected the way people experienced time. The main focus of Chapter Two is on this new experience of time. I will try to clarify how new inventions such as the wireless and the telephone influenced people's lives.

After that I will discuss the ways these changes influenced the modernist novel. Modernist art was very much self-conscious, and the writers tried to acknowledge the complexity of the world around them in their works and found that "the medium itself might be part of the problem" (Faulkner 15). Thus, in literature modernism meant "breaking away from established rules, traditions and conventions, fresh ways of looking at man's position and function in the universe and many (in some cases remarkable) experiments in form and style" (Cuddon 551). As a sign of this time became perhaps the most important theme in modernist literature. The new theories of time by Henri Bergson

and Albert Einstein were extremely influential on modernist art. The modernist writers were especially affected by Bergson’s theory of time as flow and duration. The relativity and subjectivity of time and the distinction between public and private time were very popular themes in the early 20th century. I will look at some characteristic aspects of modernist fiction and concentrate on the representation of public and private time. Chapter Two ends with a discussion of Virginia Woolf’s writing practise and the ways she manipulated time in her novels. I intend to show that representation of time was a recurring theme in her writing.

Chapter Three moves on to the analysis of time as a theme in *Orlando*. I will begin by looking how memory, past and identity are represented in the text. This section also deals with historical time, as the portrayal of historical time is a very interesting aspect of *Orlando*. In this novel, Woolf has mixed real life and fiction. She is making fun of the conventions of biographies but also making a serious point of the restrictions of historical writing. She has combined a clearly fictional story with the traditional conventions: the biographer of Orlando tries to represent a truthful picture of Orlando’s life. Woolf has included some real historical persons and events in the narrative to put the story in time and space. The historical persons give authenticity to the biographer’s attempt to write a ‘real’ biography with a proper beginning and ending. The regular appearances of Kings, Queens and famous writers give the narrative its basic linear form: Orlando is followed through different ages all the way to the book’s publishing date. There are descriptions of the customs and culture of every era and their differences are emphasised. In the second section I will consider Julia Kristeva’s theory of “Women’s Time” and show how her theory can be adapted to provide a reading of Woolf’s *Orlando*. Kristeva argues that the female subjectivity presents itself in repetition and eternity rather than in linear temporality (191). She links the linear view of the world to masculinity and to the European way of

thinking (193). I will show that Orlando's change of sex and his/her residence in Constantinople and with the gypsies can be used in the context of this theory. The thesis will close with a concluding chapter where I will sum up my findings.

1.2. Virginia Woolf

In her introduction to the *Palgrave Advances in Virginia Woolf Studies* Anna Snaith points out that Virginia Woolf has "become a ready signifier of highbrow modernism, bohemian London, 1970's feminism, elitism, aestheticism, madness, and the drive to suicide" (1). In a similar vein, Hermione Lee writes in her biography of Woolf that her

> story is reformulated by each generation. She takes on the shape of difficult modernist preoccupied with questions of form, or comedian of manners, or neurotic highbrow aesthete, or inventive fantasist, or pernicious snob, or Marxist feminist, or historian of women's lives, or victim of abuse, or lesbian heroine, or cultural analyst, depending on who is reading her, and when, and in what context. (*Virginia Woolf* 769)

Snaith explains that the controversial and passionate responses – both for and against her – derive from the fact that she dealt with such "culturally troubling questions, those that still preoccupy us in the twenty-first century" (1).

Virginia Woolf was born Adeline Virginia Stephen on 25 January 1882 in London. Her father was Sir Leslie Stephen, a well-known historian and literary critic and the editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* (Spater and Parsons 9). Although known as a free-thinker, Sir Leslie had very traditional views on family; his sons Thoby and Adrian would

go to the best public schools and to Cambridge while his daughters Vanessa and Virginia were expected to "in a decorous way, become accomplished and then marry" (Bell 1:21). Woolf felt deprived for never receiving the formal education that was unquestioningly offered to her brothers while she and her sister were taught at home by their parents and some tutors. Her parents were not very good teachers but Woolf benefited from their familiarity with William Thackeray, Lord Tennyson and Henry James, among others (Spater and Parsons 10). Virginia Woolf was mostly self-taught with the help of an atmosphere of intelligent conversation and the free use of her father's library (Rosenthal 3). Spater and Parsons point out that "[h]er exuberant imagination [was not] dulled by academic discipline, and her natural sensitivity [was not] blunted by association with less sensitive schoolfellows" (25). Both imagination and sensitivity were apparent very early, when Woolf was writing the *Hyde Park Gate News*, the family publication (Spater and Parsons 10). She was very sensitive to criticism and excitedly waited her parents' comments on the paper (Bell 1: 29). She remained very sensitive throughout her life and was always excited and anxious about having her work published (Rosenthal 2).

Virginia Woolf's mother Julia Stephen died in 1895. Instead of supporting and comforting his children, Leslie Stephen was completely devoured by his own despair and self-pity. For an already fragile Woolf this was too much, and she had a mental breakdown. She heard voices and went through periods of excited nervousness and depression (Rosenthal 4-5). She never fully recovered and struggled against mental illness all her life. The second and more serious attack occurred after the death of her father, in 1904 (Rosenthal 7). Since Sir Leslie had been very needy since his wife's death and seriously ill for a long time, his death produced mixed feelings of relief and guilt, in addition to the sorrow felt by his children. Woolf soon fell ill and this time tried to kill herself by jumping out of a window (Rosenthal 7). Her recovery was helped by moving out of the gloomy

childhood home into a new house in Bloomsbury with her sister and brothers. Woolf met her brothers' friends from Cambridge and enjoyed her newfound independence (Rosenthal 8). One of the new friends was Leonard Woolf, whom she agreed to marry in 1912. According to Quentin Bell, it "was the wisest decision of her life" (1: 187).

As a child Woolf had decided that she would become a writer (Rosenthal 2). The *Hyde Park Gate News* and the diaries she kept were her first steps on that path. After the move to Bloomsbury, she started writing literary reviews and critiques for *The Times Literary Supplement* and other papers (Parsons 12). She also started planning and writing her first novel *The Voyage Out*. It was accepted for publication in 1913, but the anticipation of its publication drove Woolf into depression and delusions. The publication of the novel was postponed after she attempted suicide (Spater and Parsons 67). *The Voyage Out* was published in 1915 and its reception was positive, although it was not a commercial success. Her next novels, *Night and Day* (1919) and *Jacob's Room* (1922), were similarly received (Spater and Parsons 84, 94, 97). Her most famous books are *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To The Lighthouse* (1927) and they were also popular with the public (Spater and Parsons 115). After *Orlando* she wrote *The Waves* (1931), *The Years* (1937) and *Between the Acts,* which was published posthumously in 1941. In addition to the nine novels, she wrote short stories and numerous essays, articles and criticisms during her life. In 1941, agitated by the war and fearing another mental breakdown she felt she might not recover from, she drowned herself (Bell 2: 226).

The story of *Orlando* begins in the sixteenth century when Queen Elizabeth comes to visit Orlando's home. Two years later he is summoned to the court and he becomes Treasurer and Stewart. Later in the court of King James the First, Orlando meets a Russian Princess and falls madly in love and scandalizes the court. The Princess betrays him and Orlando is exiled from the court to live alone in his country house. After years of solitude

he leaves England to become Ambassador in Constantinople. During the Turkish revolution he sleeps for a week and wakes up as a woman. She lives with gypsies for a while and finally returns to England at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century she marries Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, becomes a mother and also a celebrated poet.

Orlando was by far the most popular of Woolf's books, selling more than twice as much in six months as *To the Lighthouse* in a year (Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* 212). In addition to being easier to read than her previous novels, it had the bonus of being loosely based on the life of a well-known person and aristocrat, Vita Sackville-West (Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* 212). Julia Briggs records *Orlando*'s reception as highly positive, with only few adverse reviews (*Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* 212), and Rachel Bowlby in her Introduction to *Orlando* comments on the similarity of expressions used to describe the novel, whether meant as critique or praise (xvi). Bowlby also points out that the "agreement over style coupled with a division of critical estimates has continued to characterize writing about *Orlando*" but with the positive estimates outnumbering the negatives (Introduction xvi). She picks Susan Dick as an example of dismissing *Orlando* as a digression from Woolf's more serious work, giving *Orlando* only a paragraph in her book (Bowlby, Introduction xvi). Susan Squier on the other hand sees that in *Orlando* Woolf claimed "her *literary* majority [and] she confronted the influence of both literal and literary fathers to reshape the novel, and so to create a place for herself in the English novelistic tradition which was their legacy for her" (Squier 122; emphasis original). In this thesis, I will read *Orlando* as a serious work and critique of history writing, biography, and the nature of time.

2. Modernism and Time

Randall Stevenson reminds that modernism is a critical construct that has been applied in retrospect – several years after the writers had published their works (8). He points out that the writers developed their style and form of the novels independently from each other but that there still exists coherence within the modernist movement. He asks what can account for that coherence if not "mutual association and influence" (8). He concludes that "modernist fiction changed radically in structure and style because the world it envisaged changed radically at the time" (8). Modernization and technological change transformed everyday life and "new speeds, a new pace of life, contributed to new conceptions of the fundamental co-ordinates of experience, space and time" (Stevenson 9). Contemporary philosophy suggested that time and space "had ceased to exist in ways they had been conventionally been understood, and that new forms and mutual relations had to be established for them" (Stevenson 9).

This chapter is meant to illustrate the connection between modernity and modernism as a literary movement. I will begin by discussing the philosophy and the technological change of the period and how it all affected people's lives. The second section focuses on modernist novel and to the way the writers tried to do something different than before. I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of Virginia Woolf's writing and her theories of modern fiction.

2.1. Modern Philosophies of Time

According to Stephen Kern, during the period of 1880-1918 the debate about the nature of time concentrated on three oppositions: "whether time was homogenous or heterogeneous,

atomistic or a flux, reversible or irreversible" (11). He also suggests that until the late nineteenth century, virtually no one had even questioned the homogeneity of time, which was further strengthened by the introduction of standard time (11). There were both scientific and military arguments for adopting standard time but as Kern points out, the railroad companies were instrumental in its adoption. The railroads had trouble coping with the varying local times at different stations and time-tables were hard to make and keep (Kern 12). The adoption of world standard time began at the Prime Meridian Conference in Washington in 1884; and with the International Conference on Time in Paris in 1912 the local times started to collapse as time signals began to be transmitted around the world by the wireless telegraph (Kern 12, 13). Kern goes on to explain the effect that increased time measuring and standard time had on people. Punctuality and time keeping, especially work time, became ever more important and nervousness increased among people. There were some objections to the continuing and increasing pressure but as Kern points out, "the modern age embraced universal time and punctuality because these served its larger needs" (15).

Kern suggests that there was no need to argue for public time because of its wide acceptance (15). There were, however, some novelists, sociologists, and psychologists who challenged the homogeneity of time by studying the way individuals created "as many different times as there [were] life styles, reference systems, and social forms" (Kern 15). Einstein's theory of relativity was also a challenge to the homogeneity of time. He argued that "time only existed when a measurement was being made, and those measurements varied according to the relative motion of the two objects involved" (Kern 19). According to Einstein, every gravitational field in the universe had its own clock and they all moved "at a rate determined by both the intensity of the gravitational field at that point and the relative motion of the object observed" (Kern 19). Kern points out that Einstein's theory

meant that the universe was filled with clocks and they all told different, yet correct time (19). Psychiatrists also supported the relativity of time by recording the different ways in which the mentally ill perceived time (Kern 20).

Kern sees the claim for the atomistic nature of time to derive mostly from Newton, who had described time "as a sum of infinitesimally small but discrete units" (20). He also points out that until 1916, with the invention of electric clock with fluid movement of the second hand, clocks offered constant proof of time as atomistic (20). Kern examines the way the visual arts struggled to represent time, and how difficult it was to express the fluidity of time in that media (21-23). He concludes that philosophers and novelists were more effective in their attempts to challenge the atomistic time (24).

Kern points out that "the theory that time is a flux and not a sum of discrete units is linked with the theory that human consciousness is a stream and not a conglomeration of separate faculties or ideas" (24). Kern compares Bergson with William James, who was the first to use the term 'stream of consciousness,' and finds that the two agreed on the nature of human mind: "[e]ach mental event is linked with those before and after, near and remote […] There is no single pace for our mental life […] The whole of it surges and slows, and different parts move along at different rates, touching upon one another like the eddies of a turbulent current" (24).

Kern suggests that the electric light and the cinema helped to challenge the common belief of time as irreversible. The electric light made the difference of night and day less clear and the cinema created new ways of experimenting with time (29). Stopping the camera at intervals created illusions of things changing into something different in an instant and with editing the film, it was possible to change the time sequence completely (Kern 29-30). The most effective result of time reversal was achieved by running the film backwards (Kern 30). Kern also comments on the psychologists' observations that dreams

and psychoses distort time. Freud claimed that "[t]he psychic forum of our instinctual life, primary process, entirely disregards the demands of logic and space as well as time" (Kern 31). Freud later concluded that the aspect of time cannot be applied to dreams and other unconscious processes since they are timeless in their nature (Kern 31).

Kern writes that during the turn of the century era, the idea of one, uniform public time was really not challenged but that the thinkers started to concentrate on the existence of multiple private times (33). He suggests that the introduction of World Standard Time made the public time seem even more uniform and thus created the theories of personal time (33). To use Kern's words,

> The thrust of the age was to affirm the reality of private time against that of a single public time and to define its nature as heterogeneous, fluid, and reversible. That affirmation also reflected some major economic, social, and political changes of this period. As the economy in every country centralized, people clustered in cities, and political bureaucracies and governmental power grew, the wireless, telephone, and railroad timetables necessitated a universal time system to coordinate life in the modern world. And as the railroads destroyed some of the quaintness and isolation of rural areas, so did the imposition of universal public time intrude upon the uniqueness of private experience in private time. (Kern 34)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries people looked to the past "for stability in the face of rapid technological, cultural, and social change" (Kern 36). According to Kern the phonograph and camera brought the past as a part of the present by providing an access to it through recording the voices and forms of people. They also made possible a more accurate recording of historical past (38). Photography as such was an

older invention but towards the end of the nineteenth century many photographic record societies were established, including the National Photographic Record Association, which operated in unison with the British Museum (Kern 39). In England, the National Trust was also founded in 1895 with the aim of preserving historical places from growing urbanization (Kern 39).

The impact of the past on the present was theorized by philosophers and psychologists (Kern 40). Bergson claimed that all our movements leave traces that eventually affect all physical and mental processes: “The past collects in the fibres of the body as it does in the mind and determines the way we walk and dance as well as the way we think” (Kern 41). The theories and findings connected to memory and forgetting and the role of childhood that many thinkers were developing at this time were found in Freud’s psychoanalysis (Kern 41). Kern points out that

> [a]s Darwin assumed that remnants of the past are indelibly inscribed in organic matter and triggered miraculously in the proper order to allow embryos to recapitulate what has gone before, so Freud maintained that every experience, however insignificant, leaves some trace that continues to shape psychic repetitions and revisions throughout life. (42)

The understanding of the past was seen as pivotal in comprehending the present moment (Kern 43). Bergson saw the past as an active factor in the present and concluded that the human consciousness is “a thunderous action of memories that interlace, permeate, melt into, drag down and gnaw on present experience” (Kern 43). Bergson maintained that the past has a positive effect and that it is a source of freedom and meaning: “The freest individual has an integrated past and is capable of utilizing the greatest number of

memories to respond to the challenges of the present" (quoted in Kern, 46). Not all saw the value of the past as positive. Nietzsche, for example, condemned the way historicism dominated the thinking of the time and stressed that dwelling on the past leads to inaction and paralyzes the capacity of change (Kern 52). Although the value of the past was argued about, it was agreed that people must come to terms with it (Kern 57).

As the historical past was subjected to criticism the personal past became the main interest of thinkers and artists. The present seemed to be predetermined when examined in a historicist way; both individuals and societies were repeating the past and people's control of the present was diminished (Kern 61). It was emphasized that coping with the past was crucial to mental health and individual freedom (Kern 61-62). The historical past was seen as limiting individuals' autonomy and as the creator of institutions. Thus the personal past was stressed as more important; it could be understood and controlled (Kern 63). Kern also sees this emphasis on personal past rather than historical past as analogous to the debate over public and private times:

> For the personal past is private, and it varies from one individual to the next, while the historical past is collective and tends to be more homogenous [...] Thus the most distinctive general development about the nature of time [...] accords with these arguments on behalf of the personal past. To the massive, collective force of uniform public time we may add the sweeping force of history – making a composite temporal structure against which [...] the leading thinkers of this generation affirmed the reality of private time and sought to root themselves in a unique personal past. (64)

The experience of the present was transformed by the invention of the wireless and the telephone. In the early years of the twentieth century wireless news services were established, making possible for people to hear news from distant places faster than ever before (Kern 68). Even more revolutionary was the effect of the telephone, since it created an experience of simultaneity and an illusion of being in two places at the same time (Kern 69). Kern points out that this experience of simultaneity was emphasized by the fact that the early telephone systems had bells ringing along the whole line and anyone could listen to what was being said (69). The telephone was also used to broadcast news and entertainment to subscribers and thus had the regulating and intruding effect on people's lives as well as connecting them to others and diminishing isolation (Kern 69-70). Simultaneity intrigued people and new cinematic techniques were used to create the simultaneous effect: montage and contrast editing (Kern 71). Although Einstein argued that simultaneity could not exist in a universe with moving parts, the electronic communication convinced many to believe that time and space did not exist anymore and that "the present moment could be filled with many distant events" (Kern 81). The cinema allowed people to 'travel' to distant places and made possible to examine the present moment more closely: "Any moment could be pried open and expanded at will, giving the audience seemingly at once a vision of the motives for an action, its appearance from any number of perspectives, and a multitude of responses" (Kern 88).

The French psychiatrist Minkowski has divided the experience of the future into two modes: activity and expectation. Kern explains the difference of the two: "in the mode of activity the individual goes toward the future, driving into the surroundings in control of events; in the mode of expectation the future comes toward the individual, who contracts against an overpowering environment" (89-90). According to Kern, the First World War contrasted the two modes: the soldiers were forced to wait in the trenches unsure of their

future (90). Kern points out that “[w]hile expectation dominated the war experience, activity dominated the prewar period, and the two modes constitute basic polarities of this generation - how they lived the future (*and* what they knew about it)” (90, emphasis original).

Speed is an important aspect of time when discussing the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Germany started to challenge Britain’s navy and commercial fleet. Both countries built faster steamers and competed for the record of the fastest crossing of the Atlantic (Kern 109-110). Kern points out that this competition and public demand of faster ships resulted in the sinking of the Titanic, since the captains were under pressure to sacrifice safety for speed (110). The technological advancement that made possible the fast steamships also “affected how people traveled to work and how fast they worked when they got there, how they met each other and what they did together, the way they danced and walked and even, some said, the way they thought” (Kern 110). With the increase in the production of pocket watches people started to pay attention to shorter time intervals and punctuality became more important that it had been before (Kern 110-111)

The speed of transportation became important on land as well as at sea. The bicycle was much faster than walking and in the turn of the century became more common (Kern 111). The automobile had intrigued people’s imagination since the 1890’s and by the early twentieth century it had become an important means of transportation (Kern 113). As with the steamships at the sea, people became obsessed with breaking speed records. Road accidents were dramatically increased and new speed limits were introduced (Kern 113). Electricity affected speed by enabling electric trams, the underground and escalators. The telephone made business transactions faster and it was even believed that electricity would accelerate the growth of both crops and children (Kern 114). Both the telephone and the telegraph affected newspaper reporting. Events could be communicated faster and the

telegraph also affected the language used: transmissions were charged by word so reporters were encouraged to use as few and as unambiguous words as possible (Kern 115).

Kern points out that speed brought out negative effects of modernity. George M. Beard argued that the increased pace of life “intensified competition and tempo, causing an increase in the incidence of a host of problems including neurasthenia, neuralgia, nervous dyspepsia, early tooth decay, and even premature baldness” (Kern 125). Statistics showed also that cancer and heart diseases, crime, madness and suicide were increasing profoundly towards the end of the nineteenth century (Kern 125). Max Nordau believed that people would have adapted to modernity without such problems if they had had time but that modernity happened too fast (Kern 125). The modern way of life also affected the past: “the impact of the automobile and of all the accelerating technology was at least twofold - it speeded up the tempo of current existence and transformed the memory of years past, the stuff of everybody’s identity, into something slow” (Kern 129). The new technology and its effects were also a cause for nostalgia. The old way of life was seen as lost forever and thus longed for: “As steamships monopolized ocean travel, sailing vessels suddenly appeared to be majestic and graceful, instead of unreliable and cramped” (Kern 129).

Many scientists influenced the way in which people saw the reality. One of the most important influences was the work of Karl Marx. As Peter Childs points out: “Marx sees capitalism as driven to creation and recreative destruction, renewal, innovation and constant change; which are also the dynamics of Modernism” (32). He also writes that “[f]rom a Marxist viewpoint, Modernist art grew out of a European loss of communal identity, out of alienating capitalism and constant industrial acceleration” (29). This is very clearly seen in modernist writings which consisted of “apocalyptic images of earthquakes, abysses, eruptions, tidal movements, powers and forces” (Childs 31). Writers attempted to

show the social injustices very blatantly in new experimental texts and social criticism was often present in the modernist novel.

Similarly, Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution was another great influence for modernism. To quote Childs: “both evolution and capitalism were great levellers, supposedly liberating individuals from archaic rule by the clergy and the aristocracy but dividing humanity between the strong and the weak, either physically or financially” (36). However, Darwin’s theory was felt by many to be too mechanical and denying the intelligence of humans. Richard Lehan sees the work of the French philosopher Henri Bergson as a response to the previous mechanical explanations of the Enlightenment and Darwinism: “Bergson challenged at the outset the priority of a mechanistic, Darwinian evolution that robbed the universe of a creative unfolding and man of the corresponding creative power of a deep subjectivity within which the mythic, the primitive, and the intuitive could thrive” (307). Lehan does not consider Darwin and his theory of evolution as a great influence on modernism but thinks that Bergson’s theory is closer to the view of the modernist artists:

> As a literary response to these matters, modernism was uncomfortable with the main assumptions of both the Enlightenment and Darwinism. The modernists were not yet willing to write off mythic and symbolic reality, could not reconcile theories of cyclical time and history with a belief in linear evolution and mechanical progress, could not accept a mechanistic reality that gave priority to the realm of science at the expense of art and mind, and could not accept the notion of man based upon a purely rational theory of cognition and motives. (307)

Bergson believed that intuition and memory are the most important parts of the human mind. For him, these two are also inseparable in "the creation of both the universe and the self" (Lehan 311). Lehan points out that with his ideas Bergson "gave weight to the modernist belief that art is the highest function of our activity, and helped establish the modernist belief that the universe is inseparable from mind and that the self is created out of memory. If the moderns did not have Bergson, they would have had to invent him" (311).

It is, however, important to realise that Darwin played a major role in changing the values and conventions of the Victorian age and therefore influenced modernism. His theory of evolution made people unsure of their old beliefs. Both Marx and Darwin were responsible of the uncertainty people experienced about the world they lived in. People "found themselves increasingly unsure not only of the universe but of themselves; they were now seen as Godless primates sharing ancestors with other 'savage' animals" (Childs 47). According to Childs, this uncertainty and doubt made the world ready for Freud and psychoanalysis (47).

Freud was major influence on modernist novel. His ideas of hidden desires were applied by many writers. Instead of presenting the "outsides of personalities and the surfaces of minds" (Childs 51), writers started to pay attention to introspection and the inner consciousness of their characters. Freud's therapy of free association can also be seen in the modernist writings as in the inner monologue or the 'stream of consciousness' technique. Writers no longer used an omniscient narrator but rather focused on the inner thoughts of one character at the time.

Nietzsche affected the modern writing with his attack on religion and science as explanations of the world (Childs 59). He also emphasised the individual mind and hated systematisers. This became evident in the modernist novel as the desire to "speak for and

as individuals; to express the internal not describe the external world" (Childs 60). The modernist belief in cyclical time and cyclical pattern of life was also inspired by Nietzsche. According to Nietzsche,

> The individual *should* live each moment as though it were to be eternally repeated [...] eternal recurrence insisted upon the need to experience life to the full, to make the most of every moment and to accept responsibility for present actions [...] every person ought to fulfil their potential or simply 'become' what they are, and so should live as if they wanted each moment to come back again. (Childs 59-60; emphasis original)

What was very important to the way in which modernists saw the world was the theory of relativity proposed by Einstein. His assertion that "no physical law is entirely reliable, but that the observer's position will always affect the result" (Childs 66) is represented in modernist narratives in the "use of perspective, unreliability, anti-absolutism, instability, individuality and subjective perceptions" (Childs 66). The contrast between the Newtonian universe and the universe of Einstein's relativity is manifested in the contrast between the realist novel and modernist novel and their view of time. In the nineteenth century realist novel "[r]eliable, objective narrators encompassed the single perspective of a world governed by consistent, dependable scientific laws. Time was linear and narrative moved along chronological line" (Childs 67). In the modernist novel, however, time was "moving in arcs, flashbacks, jumps, repetitions and, above all, subjective leaps and swerves. Space was compressed, oppressive, threatening and subjectively perceived" (Childs 67). It could be said that modernism revolutionised the novel in the same way as Einstein revolutionised the theory of the universe.

A great influence on the concept of time in modernism is, as briefly discussed above, Bergson. He insisted on time being duration, a flow instead of a chronological series of points moving forward. Bergson's theory of time changed modernist representation of time in their fiction. According to Bergson, "'reality' [is] characterised by the different experience of time in the mind from the linear, regular beats of clock-time which measure all experience by the same gradations" (Childs 49). For Bergson the time in the mind was a duration, and each individual experiences life in different durations, each one different from everybody else's (Childs 49). Childs explains Bergson's theory:

> [C]hronological time is the time of history (hours, minutes and seconds) while duration encompasses those times in a life which are significant to an individual, and which are necessarily different for each individual. If you are asked to talk about your own life, the time that matters to you is to do with events in your growing up […] You may have several significant moments in your life which matter to you and the backdrop of clock-time is irrelevant. (49-50)

The public time is the objective and mechanical clock-time that regulates our lives. Private time is what Bergson called 'duration'. The difference between the two is easy to understand when thinking of how differently time seems to pass when one is having fun compared to when one is bored. Not all the minutes or hours seem to be the same length; sometimes a minute may feel like an hour, and an hour may sometimes feel like few minutes. I will now move on to study the way in which the new pace of life and the new theories of time affected the modernist novel.

2.2. The Modernist Novel and Time

As this section will show, new techniques began to emerge and both abrupt beginnings and open ends became common features of modernist literature (Childs 50). These new techniques were strongly connected with the new theories about the universe that were introduced during the nineteenth century.

The modernists were very much occupied with the idea of private, personal time. As David Leon Higdon points out, “the author freely mixes the various times of the characters, narrator, creator and reader in such a way that a reader often loses control of all time references” (11). The modernists paid much more attention to private than to public time. Since the novels concentrated on subjectivity and relativity of time, the function of public time in modernist fiction seems irrelevant. However, Higdon points out that it is the contrast between the two that matters: “Ultimately, public time provides the frame which gives private time its meaning” (3). One cannot exist without the other. Higdon connects public time with the structure of the novel and private time with its characters (3). The experimentation of structure and the rearrangement of the chronological order are important features of the modernist novel, and in Higdon’s view it has more to do with the public than the private time.

Some of these techniques that inspired many modernist writers, had been used by writers already much earlier, for example by Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne’s novel, published in the 1760s, had an unreliable narrator, sudden changes of perspective, and no clear story-line with a beginning and an end. Similarly, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) is also an example of earlier novels where time and logic are askew. An example of this is the scene in which Alice attends the Mad Tea Party,

and the Hatter admits that he has quarrelled with time, and now it's always six o'clock and tea-time (45-46).

> 'If you knew Time as well as I do,' said the Hatter, 'you wouldn't talk about wasting *it*. It's *him*.'
>
> 'I don't know what you mean,' said Alice.
>
> 'Of course you don't!' the Hatter said, tossing his head contemptuously. 'I dare say you never even spoke to Time!'
>
> 'Perhaps not,' Alice cautiously replied; 'but I know I have to beat time when I learn music.'
>
> 'Ah! That accounts for it,' said the Hatter. 'He wo'n't stand beating. Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock.' (45; emphasis original)

However, until the late nineteenth century these were isolated and rare occasions where private time was explored. Kern points out that towards the turn of the century attacks of the uniform standard time began to surface in fiction. As an example he takes Joseph Conrad's *Secret Agent* (1907) in which there is an anarchist plan to blow up the Greenwich Observatory (16). Stevenson points out that Conrad's writing already shows the tendency in modernist fiction of clocks and other things to take on human attributes (89) as in *Secret Agent*:

> Nothing moved in the parlour till Mrs Verloc raised her head slowly and looked at the clock with inquiring mistrust. She had become aware of a ticking sound in the room. It grew upon her ear, while she remembered clearly that the clock on

> the wall was silent, had no audible tick. What did it mean by beginning to tick so loudly all of a sudden? Its face indicated ten minutes to nine. Mrs Verloc cared nothing for time, and the ticking went on. She concluded it could not be the clock, and her sullen gaze moved along the walls, wavered, and became vague, while she strained her hearing to locate the sound. Tic, tic, tic. (230)

Randall Stevenson sees the role of Henry James and Joseph Conrad as a transitional one, linking the nineteenth century novel to modernist writing. Henry James influenced many writers and was one of the first to write a theory of the novel. He wrote prefaces to his own novels clarifying his ideas (Stevenson 18). James wrote from the viewpoint of a central character "whose perceptions and perspective shaped and focused the text" (Stevenson 18). James used a single character as a focaliser but it was still James himself who 'spoke' in the novels (Stevenson 20). James developed the novel but stayed still quite conventional. In his texts "consciousness and its devices for assimilating complex experience [...] become 'the centre of the subject'" (Stevenson 19).

Joseph Conrad was another transitional writer (Stevenson 21). Stevenson points out that for Conrad the invisible is always more important than the visible world (21). Conrad uses less objective narrators than writers before him. For example, *Lord Jim* has numerous narrators and each of them presents a different point of view (Stevenson 22). Conrad uses these different narrators to show that same events can be told quite differently depending on the point of view. In *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness* the narrator Marlow casts doubt about the truth and the visible world (Stevenson 23). According to Stevenson, *Heart of Darkness,* "like Freud, looks beneath surface behaviour towards primal forces within the self" (23). In Stevenson's view this "anticipates the modernists' deeper concern with character and the inner reaches of consciousness" (23). Stevenson points out that both

James and Conrad helped to redirect the interest in the novel “upon the see-er and ways of seeing rather than only on the characters who are seen” (25).

Stevenson sees the French author Marcel Proust as the most important link between the nineteenth century and modernist novel (95). Proust shows techniques to suppress the clock-time. His techniques – or the modernists’ – are not exactly new, but Stevenson emphasizes the scale of these techniques compared to before (92). Proust uses the first-person narrative where the narrator has awareness of two times - both of narrating and the time when the events happened (Stevenson 92). Memory is important in this new way of expressing time. Rather than starting from the beginning of things, the narrative follows the order of recalling the events (Stevenson 92-93). The randomness of involuntary memory is the basis of the narrative. A sound or a smell can trigger association suddenly and the narrative follows the path of these memories (Stevenson 93). As Stevenson points out, this technique opens up the past into the present and also frees the narrative from the restrictions of the clock (95). The famous example of Proust’s technique in *In Search of Lost Time* describes how a cup of tea and madeleine cakes take Marcel back to his childhood:

> [A]t the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake-crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening in me […] And I begin asking myself again what could it be, this unknown state which brought with it no logical proof, but only the evidence of its felicity, its reality, and in whose presence the other states of consciousness faded away. I want to make it reappear […] And suddenly the memory appeared […] all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann’s park, and the water-lilies on the Vivonne, and the good people of the village and their little dwellings and the

> church and all of Combray and its surroundings, all of this which is assuming form and substance, emerged, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea. (I, 47-50)

Stevenson points out that hostility to clocks as time-measurers is not unique to the twentieth century but that the hostility was focused and intensified by many factors in the late nineteenth century. He takes as an example the movement away from rural areas where clocks played no part, to towns and factory work where everything was timed and controlled by clocks (117). Shift-work and assembly lines made it necessary to record arrivals and departures of all the workers. Frederick W. Taylor's scientific management went even further, and every phase of work was to be regulated by the clock (Stevenson 117). In scientific management the system is more important than the individual. According to Stevenson, workers were treated as components of machines to keep the factory running (118). In D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, this new attitude of scientific management is seen in Gerald Crich's way of modernizing the mine:

> [T]hen began the great reform. Expert engineers were introduced in every department […] New machinery was brought from America, such as the miners had never seen before, great iron men, as the cutting machines were called, and unusual appliances. The working of the pits was thoroughly changed, all the control was taken out of the hands of the miners, the butty system was abolished. Everything was run on the most accurate and delicate scientific method, educated and expert men were in control everywhere, the miners were reduced to mere mechanical instruments. (265-266)

Stevenson sees the clock as a "crucial agent in the new rule of the machine" (119). People could now be represented by the clock in literature, as in *Women in Love*:

> Oh God, the wheels within wheels of people, it makes one's head tick like a clock, with a very madness of dead mechanical monotony and meaninglessness [...] All life, all life resolved itself into this: tick-tack, tick-tack, tick-tack; then the striking of the hour; then the tick-tack, tick-tack, and the twitching of the clock fingers. (523-524)

In *Women in Love*, Gudrun expresses horror of the new rule of the machine and the regulation of the clock. She sees both the industrial master Gerald and the men working in the mines turning into one big machine:

> Let them turn into mechanisms, let them. Let them become instruments, pure machines, pure wills, that work like clockwork, in perpetual repetition [...] let them be perfect parts of a great machine [...] the miner, with a thousand wheels, and then the electrician, with three thousand, and the underground manager, with twenty thousand, and the general manager with a hundred thousand little wheels working away to complete his make-up, and then Gerald, with a million wheels and cogs and axles.
>
> Poor Gerald, such a lot of little wheels to his make-up! He was more intricate than a chronometer-watch! (526)

This example shows how the modernist writers were critical about the new technology emerging in the early twentieth century, and how it affected the individuals. In Stevenson's

view the hostility to clocks is also shown by the modernist author's readiness to disregard chronological sequence (90).

In this section I have discussed the modernist novel and the new techniques used by writers who wanted to modernise their art form. I will now move on to discuss Virginia Woolf and her views on how to make the novel modern.

2.3. Virginia Woolf and Modern Fiction

This section will concentrate on Virginia Woolf's writing and on her ideas about the modern novel. Virginia Woolf was not happy with the fiction written in Britain in the early twentieth century. She thought that writers like Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells, and John Galsworthy wrote too much about things and not enough about people. In her essay "Modern Fiction," published in 1925, she claims that these writers "spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring" (159). Woolf thought that they were ignoring something essential by focusing in the material world: "Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide" ("Modern Fiction" 160). Woolf herself was concerned with creating a new type of fiction that was not based on convention, as she states in "Modern Fiction": "[I]f a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style" (160). Woolf aimed to capture the nature of human consciousness and her characters are revealed through what they themselves think and say and also by how other characters see them. She builds her stories through these contradictory impressions and

viewpoints. Woolf's first two novels, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919), were written in quite conventional style, but *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) are much more experimental in their dealing with character and plot. She is trying to understand the characters from within, not commenting on them from the outside. *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse* represent in practice the theories that she put forward in her essays, in which she examines the presentation of life and thoughts, the quality of experience, and the interaction between the present and the past. As Woolf writes in "Modern Fiction":

> Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there [...] Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? [...] Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. (160-161)

In her conclusion to "Modern Fiction" Woolf emphasizes the relevance of any impressions or methods the writer chooses to use: "[T]here is no limit to the horizon, and that nothing – no 'method', no experiment, even of the wildest – is forbidden, but only falsity and pretence. 'The proper stuff of fiction' does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss" (164).

In her unfinished memoir "A Sketch of the Past" Woolf mentions something she ends up calling "moments of being" (81). She concludes that experience can be divided into moments of being and non-being (81). Moments of being are the times in life that are memorable, they leave a lasting mark on the mind and can be recalled easily and even involuntarily. What separates moments of being from non-being seems to be the intensity of feeling and not so much the events themselves. Most of life is lived without thinking about it. As Woolf explains, the moments of being are "embedded in a kind of nondescript cotton wool […] A great part of every day is not lived consciously. One walks, eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done" ("A Sketch of the Past" 81). Moments of being are the memories that come back and feel even more real than the present moment.

Jeanne Schulkind argues that Woolf's aim as a novelist was to convey both the outer and the inner self (22). She writes: "just as the outer limits of personality are blurred and unstable because of the responsiveness of the self to the forces of the present moment, so the boundaries of the inner self are vague and at moments, non-existent […] when the self merges with reality, all limits associated with the physical world cease to exist" (21-22). An example of this merging of the self is in *To the Lighthouse* as Mrs Ramsay sits alone in the quiet house:

> All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others […] and this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures. When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless […] our apparitions, the things you know us by, are simply childish. Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by. (*To the Lighthouse* 45)

Schulkind discusses the way Woolf builds her characters by adding new experiences to old ones and how the new ones always slightly change the consciousness by making new combinations: “The present moment is enriched by the past but the past is also enriched by the present. This view of the self which emphasizes simultaneously the change and continuity of the individual identity is of central importance in Virginia Woolf's fiction” (16). She also writes the following:

> That self was an elusive will o' the wisp, always just ahead on the horizon, flickering and insubstantial, yet enduring. She believed the individual identity to be always in flux, every moment changing its shape in response to the forces surrounding it […] and the past, on which the identity of the present moment rests, is never static, never fixed like a fly in amber, but as subject to alteration as the consciousness that recalls it. (Schulkind 14-15)

In an essay “The Moment: Summer's Night” Woolf further expresses her views of the relationship between past, present, and the future:

> Yet what composed the present moment? If you are young, the future lies upon the present, like a piece of glass, making it tremble and quiver. If you are old, the past lies upon the present, like a thick glass, making it waver, distorting it. All the same, everybody believes that the present is something, seeks out the different elements in this situation in order to compose the truth of it, the whole of it. (9)

Harvena Richter sees this essay as "Woolf's closest attempt to examine her own subjective methods" (27). The methods Richter discusses are the ones described in "Modern Fiction", of "the ordinary mind on an ordinary day" ("Modern Fiction" 160). In "The Moment: Summer's Night" Woolf examines the impressions received by the character in a short period of time. Richter emphasizes the sensory impressions of the essay through which the "reader is made to watch the external scene and to participate in it through corresponding reactions in body and mind" (28). Richter also explains how "[v]isual impressions coalesce to form an emotion which begins a flight of thought, an instantaneous flash of daydream" (29). According to Richter, this essay shows what Woolf "felt must be conveyed in order to put the reader inside the consciousness of the character" (29). To succeed in accomplishing a point of view of a character, "the reader is asked not only to see, hear, taste, smell, and feel a multitude of impressions *simultaneously*, but also to experience mentally the associational actions of these physical impressions upon his thoughts and their result upon his body" (Richter 29; emphasis original).

In her essay "Character in Fiction" Woolf writes that: "I believe that all novels […] deal with character, and that it is to express character – not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved" ("Character in

Fiction" 425). In *Jacob's Room* she states that "[i]t is no good trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, not yet entirely what is done" (*Jacob's Room* 21). In Woolf's fiction characters are revealed through different angles and viewpoints. In *To the Lighthouse* the reader learns about Mrs. Ramsay not only from her own thoughts but from the contradictory thoughts others have of her. Lily Briscoe sums up this view of the impossibility to pin down a character: "Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman" (*To the Lighthouse* 147).

The way Woolf deals with characters is strongly linked with the structure of her novels and the idea of time in them. The technique is similar to the one used by Marcel Proust, where memory and association are emphasized. A sound, a smell, or any small incident can trigger a memory for the character and the narrative shifts in time accordingly. *Mrs. Dalloway*'s plot takes place during one day but readers learn a lot about the characters' past through their memories. In the very beginning of the novel Mrs. Dalloway is reminded of her youth by the weather:

> And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach.
>
> What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 1)

In *Mrs. Dalloway* the clock-time is used to develop the structure of the novel. Different characters in various parts of London hear the same clock striking or a car backfiring, and this creates the effect of simultaneity. The public clock-time is not just a negative and

regulating factor. Time intrudes the lives of individuals but it can also be a connecting feature between characters. Here the notion of gender becomes important; as Peter Childs writes: “Men are seen as dividing and women connecting” (*Modernism* 172). An example of this is the two clocks of Big Ben and St Margaret’s that are contrasted with each other in the following two passages:

> The sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour struck between them with extraordinary vigour, as if a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 47)

> Ah, said St Margaret’s, like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there already. I am not late. No, it is precisely half-past eleven, she says. Yet, though she is perfectly right, her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality. Some grief for the past holds it back; some concern for the present. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 48)

Erich Auerbach suggests in “The Brown Stocking”, an analysis of *To the Lighthouse*, a reason for modern novelists’ choice of one day as the time-frame of their writing:

> He who represents the course of a human life, or a sequence of events extending over a prolonged period of time, and represents it from beginning to end, must prune and isolate arbitrarily. Life has always long since begun, and it is always still going on. And those people whose story the author is telling experience much more than he can ever hope to tell. But the things that happen to a few

> individuals in the course of a few minutes, hours, or possibly even days – these one can hope to report with reasonable completeness. (41)

Auerbach's study also shows the relationship between public time and private time in *To the Lighthouse*. He examines the section five of "The Window" (19) and demonstrates the difference between the two times. The measuring of the sock Mrs. Ramsay is knitting takes only a few moments but during this time Mrs. Ramsay's mind wanders from the shabby furniture to reading books and to the Swiss maid's anxiety over her dying father (Auerbach 24)

Randall Stevenson sees that Woolf was preoccupied by the distinctions between fluidity and division in all her writing (138). Stevenson points out the difference between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, where "the intuitive wholeness" of her mind is contrasted with the "little separate incidents" of his mind (139). Division and flow are also contrasted in the way that across "its character's thoughts and memories, there falls both the beam of the lighthouse, with its clock-like rhythm of recurrence, and the shadow of time and history, intruding in the middle section of the novel, 'Time Passes', to shatter the hopes and trouble the memories outlined in the first and third parts" (Stevenson 139). In *Mrs Dalloway* there are clocks chiming everywhere, announcing the passage of time:

> Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion, until the mound of time was so far diminished that a commercial clock, suspended above a shop in Oxford Street, announced, genially and fraternally, as if it were a pleasure to

> Messrs Rigby and Lowndes to give the information gratis, that it was half-past one.
>
> Looking up, it appeared that each letter of their names stood for one of the hours; subconsciously one was grateful to Rigby and Lowndes for giving one time ratified by Greenwich; and this gratitude […] naturally took the form later of buying off Rigby and Lowndes socks or shoes. (*Mrs Dalloway* 103)

Stevenson discusses how this example typifies Bergson's "views of time in the mind as something whole or continuous […] but one which is shredded and divided up by time on the clock" while also exemplifying the sense of time connected with commerce – "of time commodified and turned into saleable socks and shoes" (140).

In "The Mark on the Wall" Woolf deals with the inner monologue of a character who is trying to figure out what the small black stain on the wall actually is. In the course of describing the character's thoughts, Woolf also explores the changed pace of life in the early twentieth century:

> Oh! dear me, the mystery of life; The inaccuracy of thought! The ignorance of humanity! […] what an accidental affair this living is after all our civilization […] Why, if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour – landing at the other end without a single hairpin in one's hair! Shot out at the feet of God entirely naked! Tumbling head over heels in the asphodel meadows like brown paper parcels pitched down a shoot in the post office! With one's hair flying back like the tail of a race-horse. Yes, that seems to express the rapidity of life, the perpetual waste and repair; all so casual, all so haphazard… ("The Mark on the Wall" 48)

Angeliki Spiropoulou points out that Woolf's writing "can be read both as pointers to their historical context, the high point of modernity, and as attempts to intervene with how history itself is perceived and recorded (2). Spiropoulou emphasizes Woolf's commitment to history writing despite the fact that modernism is often seen as "a flight from history into the mind of the individual" (2). Spiropoulou also points out that "Woolf is well aware that how the past is represented is a major stake in the feminist and wider political struggle […] which […] leads her to criticize official historiography for its exclusionist and silencing effect and simultaneously develops an alternative historiography which would do justice to the oppressed and the defeated, mainly women and other 'outsiders' to authority" (3).

This section has studied Woolf's ideas about modern fiction and her view of the importance of representing the character from within. I have discussed Woolf's theories of the modern novel through her essays and shown her method in practise with examples from her novels. I will now move on to the analysis of *Orlando*.

3. Time in *Orlando*

This chapter focuses on *Orlando* and provides an analysis of the role of time in the novel. Time is a very important theme in *Orlando*, as many historical periods are described and many real historical figures appear in the novel. The importance of time is emphasized further on every level of the story. The novel contains numerous passages that imply the passing of time: it shows changing seasons and hours of day passing by. Even Orlando's house is described as a sort of house of time with its 365 bedrooms and 52 staircases corresponding to the number of days and weeks of the year. The description of Orlando wandering around his house can also be interpreted as passing of time. The house is usually mentioned when the time in the novel is passing very fast: "The three hundred and sixty-five bedrooms were full for a month at a time. Guests jostled each other on the fifty-two staircases […] Thus, in a very few years, Orlando had worn the nap off his velvet, and spent the half of his fortune" (*Orlando* 107-108). Woolf also uses the circle of seasons to describe the passage of time, as the following excerpt shows

> Here he came then, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. He saw the beech trees turn golden and the young ferns unfurl; he saw the moon sickle and then circular; he saw – but probably the reader can imagine the passage which should follow […] how night succeeds day and day night; how there is first a storm and then fine weather; how 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; a conclusion which, one cannot help feeling, might have been reached more quickly by the simple

> statement that 'Time passed' (here the exact amount could be indicated in brackets) and nothing whatever happened. (*Orlando* 94)

This strategy of lengthily describing how nothing happens is also a parody of Woolf's own eloquent and poetic writing in *To the Lighthouse*, especially of its 'Time Passes' section.

I will begin my analysis by discussing the way Woolf experimented with her ideas about biography in *Orlando* in section 3.1. In this section I will also discuss memory and identity and their relation to historical time. The second section concentrates on Julia Kristeva's theory of 'Women's Time' and will provide a reading of *Orlando* based on her theory.

3.1. Biography, Memory and Identity

This section looks into the way Woolf uses the conventions of biography to point out flaws in history writing. Memory, identity, and moments of being are important aspects in Woolf's method. Julia Briggs points out that as a writer who concentrated on representing consciousness and subjectivity, Woolf was very aware of time "both as an impersonal force and as a personal experience, as shared time and individual time […] She was aware […] of time in memory and thought […] and of time as history, whether personal, familial, cultural, social or political" (Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf* 125). This awareness is captured in the passage of *Orlando*, where the narrator ponders the different effects of time on nature and the human mind:

> But Time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality, has no such simple effect upon the mind of man. The

> mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second. This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation. (*Orlando* 94-95)

This passage can be read as Woolf's version of the theory of private time. The effect of time and memory on an individual identity is of central importance in Woolf's work and in *Orlando* in particular. With the life of the fictional character she is able to explore her belief that time is not universal or objective.

James O'Sullivan sees Woolf's use of the clock as a symptom of her awareness of time as an objective and a subjective measure. He also points out that in *Orlando* the personal time is much more prominent than objective clock-time (42), and claims that the clock holds "more significance as a cultural symbol than it does as a scientific instrument. This position is continually reinforced through the image of the clock as a technology of time" (43). The clock is present in Orlando's moments of crisis, for example at the time of discovering Sasha's deceit: "Suddenly, with an awful and ominous voice, […] St Paul's struck the first stroke of midnight. Four times more it struck remorselessly. […] When the twelfth struck he knew that his doom was sealed" (*Orlando* 58). Later in the novel Orlando is even assaulted by the clock: "Orlando leapt as if she had been violently struck on the head. Ten times she was struck. In fact it was ten o'clock in the morning" (284). The social power of the clock is seen when Orlando fails "to rise at his usual hour […] Nor could he be awakened" (*Orlando* 64). This causes a sense of alarm that in O'Sullivan's view arises from the fact that Orlando "is not behaving in accordance with objective time as

determined by the clock" (43). Orlando sleeps for a week and awakens at his own time, when he is ready. This demonstrates that while the objective clock-time "has absolute social power, it does not hold absolute personal power, as all individuals experience it differently" (O'Sullivan 43).

In her essay "The New Biography" Woolf discusses the difficulty of combining the truth about a person's life with her/his personality as represented in a biography: "[I]f we think of truth as something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility and reflect that the aim of biography is to weld these two into one seamless whole, we shall admit that the problem is a stiff one" ("The New Biography" 473). She goes on to discuss the difficulties involved: "For in order that the light of personality may shine through, facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded: yet, in the process, they must never lose their integrity" ("The New Biography" 473).

Orlando is in a way an exercise for Woolf in which she could freely experiment her ideas about biography and history writing with a fictional character. In this novel she is able to express her ideas about time, memory and identity in a way that would be limited in a biography of a real person. For example, Bergson's belief that the past is never forgotten but it coexists in the present moment (Stevenson 107) is an important theme in *Orlando*:

> [I]t 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. (*Orlando* 291)

This theme of the past being always present in a person's life is also connected with the idea of involuntary memory, already discussed briefly in section 2.2. in connection with Proust. In *Orlando* the idea of involuntary memory is compared to a seamstress:

> Memory is the seamstress, and a capricious one at that. Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither. We know not what comes next, or what follows after. Thus, the most ordinary movement in the world, such as sitting down at a table and pulling the inkstand towards one, may agitate a thousand odd, disconnected fragments, now bright, now dim, hanging and bobbing and dipping and flaunting. (*Orlando* 75-76)

Orlando lives centuries and she can remember the past. Her memory of the past is random and involuntary: she is reminded of past catastrophes by incidents in the present. For example she remembers the end of the Great Frost in the reign of James I while watching the traffic in contemporary London: "Omnibus seemed to pile itself upon omnibus and then jerk itself apart. So the ice blocks had pitched and tossed that day on the Thames. An old nobleman in furred slippers had sat astride one of them. There he went – she could see him now – calling down maledictions upon the Irish rebels. He had sunk there, where her car stood" (*Orlando* 290).

The involuntary memory is linked with what Woolf has elsewhere called moments of being ("A Sketch of the Past" 81), this is, the emotionally powerful memories that shape a person. Orlando's long life includes many memories but the most lasting one is the affair with Sasha during the Great Frost. Thus centuries later, in the 1920s, Orlando remembers her suddenly while shopping at a department store:

> She looked just as pouting, as sulky, as handsome, as rosy (like a million-candled Christmas tree, Sasha had said) as she had done that day on the ice, when the Thames was frozen and they had gone skating –
>
> 'The best Irish linen, Ma'am,' said the shopman, spreading the sheets on the counter, – and they had met an old woman picking up sticks. Here, as she was fingering the linen abstractedly, one of the swing-doors between the departments opened and let through, perhaps from the fancy-goods department, a whiff of scent, waxen, tinted as if from pink candles, and the scent curved like a shell round a figure – was it a boy's or was it a girl's? – young, slender, seductive – a girl, by God! furred, pearled, in Russian trousers; but faithless, faithless!
>
> 'Faithless!' cried Orlando (the man had gone) and all the shop seemed to pitch and toss with yellow water and far off she saw the masts of the Russian ship standing out to sea. (*Orlando* 288-289)

Here a glimpse of a woman wearing furs and a smell of candles brings back the memory of Sasha so strongly that the present moment fades and the memory is more real.

Orlando also has multiple selves as a result of not forgetting the past. S/he has been an aristocratic boy, an ambassador, a poet, and a mother, just to give a few examples. Spiropoulou writes that by having multiple selves, Orlando "draws attention to the

necessary selectivity of the biographer/historian, the impossibility of an exhaustive coverage of their subject" (79). In the novel Orlando's biographer confides his dilemma: "[S]he had 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 may well have as many thousand" (*Orlando* 294-295).

The portrayal of historical time is a very interesting and central aspect of *Orlando*. In this novel, Woolf is mixing real life with fiction. She is making fun of the conventions of biographies but also making a serious point about the restrictions of historical writing. She has combined a clearly fictional story with the traditional conventions. This is seen in the novel in the way in which the biographer attempts to represent a truthful picture of Orlando's life:

> From deed to deed, from glory to glory, from office to office he must go, his scribe following after, till they reach whatever seat it may be that is the height of their desire. (*Orlando* 14)

This passage emphasizes the expectations of a biography of a young nobleman to be about his success in public offices and ending in the highest honours. The narrator later claims that a biographer's "simple duty of is to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may" (*Orlando* 63). The narrator sets the rules of biography and then proceeds to break every rule.

Rachel Bowlby has examined *Orlando*'s historical time in her book *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations*. She points out the way in which Woolf shows the limitations of written histories:

> [T]aking the ostensible hero(ine) of the biography to be a character who lives for five hundred years is a device first of all to show up the illusory position of the history-writer as a reliable reconstructor of a past 'world'. The fact that, within the terms of the fiction, Orlando does experience at first hand each successive age, and hence has the authority to compare them, exposes the dubious claims of the historian to 'know' a period other than his own. (128-129)

Bowlby goes on to suggest that because *Orlando* is a biography, not an autobiography, it complicates the position of the historian even further. In her introduction to *Orlando* Bowlby asks whether the biographer is always living in the same time period as Orlando, or is he supposed to be in the readers' time (xxxvii). The question is hard to answer since at times the biographer seems to be sharing Orlando's secrets, but at other times he or she is referring to old fragments of documents, which would suggest that he or she is writing about the past:

> We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain; but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to use the imagination […] Again, details are lacking, for the fire had its way with all such records, and has left only tantalizing fragments which leave the most important points obscure. (*Orlando* 115, 122)

The issue is complicated further in Chapter Two of *Orlando* that opens with an apology from the narrator/biographer who writes of his difficulties to find provable facts about Orlando's life:

> 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. (*Orlando* 63)

However, the previous chapter contains no references to documents. *Orlando*'s narrator dismisses the reliability of standard biographies by constantly reminding the reader that the narrative is a construct: as Spiropoulou claims, the narrator keeps pointing out what can and cannot be done in a biography (78). For example, in the beginning of Orlando's biography the narrator ponders upon the difficulty of representing his subject: "Directly we glance at eyes and forehead, we have to admit a thousand disagreeables which it is the aim of every good biographer to ignore" (*Orlando* 15). This can be compared with Woolf's own view of biographical writing. In her essay "The Art of Biography" Woolf discusses the censorship placed on biographies, either by the writers themselves or by the subject's living relatives (120). Spiropoulou notes the pressure to idealize the subject of a biography "while complications and emotions ought to be suppressed" (78). There are many examples in *Orlando* where Woolf uses the freedom provided by a fictional subject to emphasize this censorship. At one point the narrator makes it clear that sexuality is not a suitable subject to be discussed: "But let other pens treat sex and sexuality; we quit such odious subjects as soon as we can" (*Orlando* 134). Elsewhere the narrator leaves it to novelists to "smooth out the crumpled silk and all its implications" (*Orlando* 71). Another example is when the narrator refuses to describe the London society: "To give a truthful

account of London society at that or indeed at any other time, is beyond the powers of the biographer or the historian. Only those who have little need of the truth, and no respect for it – the poets and the novelists – can be trusted to do it" (*Orlando* 184).

As a further example of its critique of conventional historical writing, *Orlando* mocks the evidence and authority of historians and eye-witnesses. For example the Great Frost is described as "historians tell us" (*Orlando* 32) but the description that follows is quite unbelievable and fantastical: "Birds froze in mid-air and fell like stones to the ground. At Norwich a young countrywoman started to cross the road in her usual robust health and was seen by the onlookers to turn visibly to powder and be blown in a puff of dust over the roofs as the icy blast struck her at the street corner" (*Orlando* 32-33).

Spiropoulou points out that Orlando is not a typical choice as a subject of a biography. Even as a man Orlando is more eccentric than great, and his change of sex distances her further from the traditional life of a great man (Spiropoulou 79). Spiropoulou also notes the narrator's tendency to concentrate on the trivial or fantastic elements of Orlando's life instead of the major events of his public life (79). The narrative starts when Orlando is a teenager but the readers are never told the exact date of the opening nor is Orlando's date of birth ever revealed. When the narrator gives a date, it is usually in the case of very arbitrary events. The narrator tells that Orlando fails to wake up "[o]ne June morning – it was Saturday the 18th" (*Orlando* 64). The readers are also told that Orlando gives birth to a son "on Thursday, March the 20th, at three o'clock in the morning" (*Orlando* 282) but the year of the event is omitted. The only complete date given in the book is at the end, telling exactly when the narrative ends: "And the twelfth stroke of midnight sounded; the twelfth stroke of midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen hundred and Twenty Eight" (*Orlando* 314).

Bowlby calls this kind of a biography "the 'life and times' mode of biography" (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 129). She writes that "Woolf's narrative puts side by side two conventional conceptions of the criteria by which an 'age' may legitimately be identified" (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 129). These are 'the spirit of the age' kind of construction and objective description (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 129, 130). 'The spirit of the age' type of history puts every period under some blanket term: The Age of Reason or The Age of Progress. The different ages are defined by the ones preceding and succeeding them (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 130). According to Bowlby, "[s]uch stories […] are habitually progressive: they imply that the present, or some hypothetically projected future, is the end or telos to which previous ages have been tending" (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 130).

An example of a certain kind of 'the spirit of the age' history in *Orlando* is its character Nick Greene. According to Bowlby, he represents the pessimistic and nostalgic variety of such history (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 130). He is always missing some lost glory of past age. In the seventeenth century Nick Greene laments that:

> the great age of literature is past; the great age of literature was the Greek; the Elizabethan age was inferior in every respect to the Greek […] Now all young writers were in the pay of the booksellers and poured out any trash that would sell. Shakespeare was the chief offender in this way and Shakespeare was already paying the penalty. Their own age, he said, was marked by precious conceits and wild experiments – neither of which the Greeks would have tolerated for a moment […] he could see no good in the present and had no hope for the future. (*Orlando* 85-86)

The same man puts it in the nineteenth century in the following way:

> [T]he great days of literature are over. Marlow, Shakespeare, Ben Johnson – those were the giants […] all our young writers are in the pay of the booksellers. They turn out any trash that serves to pay their tailor's bills. It is an age […] marked by precious conceits and wild experiments – none of which the Elizabethans would have tolerated for an instant. (*Orlando* 265)

Here Nick Greene represents nostalgia as he reveres ancient culture and despises contemporary culture regardless of the time in which he is speaking. As an Elizabethan he thinks that Shakespeare is no good but thinks very highly of him in the nineteenth century. As briefly discussed in Chapter Two in terms of steamships and sailing vessels, when people think something is lost to them they often start to imagine that the old way is better than the current way of life. By having Nick Greene reappear in the nineteenth century and use exactly the same phrases to describe the Elizabethans as he once used of the Greeks allows Woolf to show the absurdity of thinking that old literature is somehow better and more valuable.

The other way of modelling a historical period is by providing precise descriptions of everyday life. *Orlando* is full of highly detailed descriptions of events and places. As Susan Dick points out: "[t]he activities of Orlando's daily life, along with the people and places Orlando encounters are all rendered with a realist's attention to detail" (63). Perhaps the best example of this detailed description is when Orlando decides to refurbish his house and makes an inventory of the things needed:

> He now set to work in earnest, as we can prove beyond a doubt if we look at his ledgers. Let us glance at an inventory of what he bought at this time […]
>
> 'To fifty pairs of Spanish blankets, ditto curtains of crimson and white taffeta; the valence to them of white satin embroidered with crimson and white silk…
>
> 'To seventy yellow satin chairs and sixty stools, suitable with their buckram covers to them all… (*Orlando* 105)

Bowlby maintains that these two ways of describing an age have in common "an implied narrative about the progress or decline from one age to the next" (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 131). This cyclical movement from lightness to darkness and back again is best illustrated in the novel's descriptions of three different historical periods. Orlando looks out of her window at the very end of the eighteenth century and remembers London as it was in the sixteenth century. She also witnesses the arrival of nineteenth century:

> [I]n the reign of Queen Elizabeth […] the city, if such one could call it, lay crowded, a mere huddle and conglomeration of houses […] The stars reflected themselves in deep pits of stagnant water which lay in the middle of the streets. A black shadow at the corner where the wine shop used to stand was, as likely as not, the corpse of a murdered man […] Here and there, on one of the hills which rose above London, was a stark gallows tree, with a corpse nailed to rot or parch on its cross; for danger and insecurity, lust and violence, poetry and filth swarmed over the tortuous Elizabethan highways and buzzed and stank – Orlando could remember even now the smell of them on a hot night – in the little rooms

> and narrow pathways of the city. Now – she leant out of her window – all was light, order, and serenity. (*Orlando* 214-215)

> As the ninth, tenth, and eleventh strokes struck, a huge blackness sprawled over the whole of London. With the twelfth stroke of midnight, the darkness was complete. A turbulent welter of cloud covered the city. All was darkness; all was doubt; all was confusion. The Eighteenth century was over; the Nineteenth century had begun. (*Orlando* 216)

As the novel claims, language and literature are important ways to distinguish between the different ages and their characteristics. Every age has its own literary conventions, and Woolf is imitating these in *Orlando*. For example, the writings of Orlando change from one century to another: in the Elizabethan times he writes poems and drama like "The Birth of Pyramus" or "The Death of Hippolytus" (*Orlando* 73). Later during the eighteenth century, the Age of Reason, she writes very different texts, following the fashion of the time. At this part of the novel, male characters such as Addison, Pope and Swift play a central role in the life of Orlando. It should be noted that it is not only the writing habits of Orlando that change, but even the narrator adopts the language of the time period in question in some cases. For instance, when he describes the Elizabethan Age, he imitates the language of the Elizabethan poets by using sentences reminiscent of Elizabethan poems:

> The age was Elizabethan […] Everything was different […] Sunsets were redder and more intense; dawns were whiter and more auroral […] The rain fell vehemently, or not at all. The sun blazed or there was darkness […] the poets

> sang beautifully how roses fade and petals fall. The moment is brief they sang; the moment is over; one long night is then to be slept by all […] And what the poets said in rhyme, the young translated into practice. Girls were roses, and their seasons were short as the flowers'. Plucked they must be before nightfall; for the day was brief and the day was all. (*Orlando* 26-27)

This passage suggests that the writer of the biography is living in a different time and is looking back at the Elizabethan age. This reveals the difficulty in history writing; how can anyone be reliable in reconstructing the past? Orlando does experience all of the ages herself in this novel and in so doing challenges the historian's claim that he is telling the truth and that he knows all the periods in question (Bowlby, *Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 129).

Bowlby points out another problem of writing biographies: who decides what is relevant in someone's life (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 136)? This is illustrated by Orlando's biographer as he decides that the celebrations that follow the results of Orlando's lawsuits are not relevant to his story (*Orlando* 244). In a conventional biography the author would not let the reader know his/her selection process but Woolf uses her narrator, once again, to underline the problematic nature of historical and biographical writing. Another good example of this can be noticed when the narrator is frustrated because Orlando is only sitting and thinking. Instead of omitting the part of Orlando's life that he thinks is irrelevant he insist on sticking to the truth: "But what can the biographer do when his subject has put him in the predicament into which Orlando has now put us?" (*Orlando* 254). He is trying to imagine what Orlando might do while he is waiting for her to actually do something:

> Orlando sat so still that you could have heard a pin drop. Would, indeed, that a pin had dropped! That would have been life of a kind. Or if a butterfly had fluttered through the window and settled on her chair, one could write about that. Or suppose she had got up and killed a wasp. Then, at once, we could out with our pens and write. (*Orlando* 255)

In this section I have studied the ways in which Woolf's ideas about biography, time and identity play a central role in *Orlando*. The next section will examine Orlando's change of sex and its implications in terms of history and Orlando's identity.

3.2. Women's Time

This section places the novel in the context of Julia Kristeva's theory of women's time. Julia Kristeva argues that female subjectivity presents itself in repetition and eternity rather than in linear temporality. She writes that "there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature" (191). Kristeva's view of cyclical time as a part of the female subjectivity is highly relevant to *Orlando*. The change of sex results in the breaking up of the linear structure of the novel and the male biographer is left at loss as to what to do when his subject does not behave as a subject of a biography should. Kristeva continues that female subjectivity in its intuitiveness becomes a problem to the time of history. This is connected with her suggestion that

> the time has perhaps come to emphasize the multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupations so that from the intersection of these differences there might arise, more precisely, less commercially and more truthfully, the real *fundamental*

> *difference* between the two sexes: a difference that feminism has had the enormous merit of rendering painful, that is, productive of surprises and of symbolic life in a civilization which, outside the stock exchange and wars, is bored to death. (Kristeva 193; emphasis original)

According to Bowlby, Orlando's change of sex can be seen as the beginning of women's time and it "might imply a move away from the centuries of patriarchy" (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 49). She also suggests that it might represent a more general feminisation of values: "[f]rom active control [...] to a state of relative passivity" (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 49).

Bowlby makes an interesting point of women's clothing and the way they symbolise women's seclusion from the male society. In this context the significance of the following passage in *Orlando* is emphasized by Bowlby:

> If we compare the picture of Orlando as a man with that of Orlando as a woman we shall see that though both are undoubtedly one and the same person, there are certain changes. The man has his hand free to seize his sword, the woman must use hers to keep the satins from slipping from her shoulders. The man looks the world full in the face, as if it were made for his uses and fashioned to his liking. The woman takes a sidelong glance at it, full of subtlety, even of suspicion. Had they both worn the same clothes, it is possible that their outlook might have been the same. (*Orlando* 180)

In her study Bowlby argues that like women have to preserve their modesty, the same way they have to hide their opinions. Just like the body must be kept invisible, hidden, the

private thoughts have to be kept out of sight lest the security and structure of dominant male society break down:

> the 'sidelong glance' of the woman shows her place outside the magic circle, liable to, and/or capable of, looking with 'suspicion' or 'subtlety' at the world which the man regards with complete acceptance. Just as her failure to preserve the outward forms of clothing decorum would threaten the security of the man's world-view, so it is from her position of not fitting in – of constantly adjusting her attire, and of not being at one with the world – that the woman's 'sidelong glance' at the masculine world proceeds. (*Virginia Woolf: Feminist Destinations* 52-53)

This observation can be easily linked with Kristeva's ideas about the multiplicity of female expressions. Women are left outside the circles of men and have to find various ways of coping with their situation. As a man, Orlando has only one role at a time; he is a young nobleman or an Ambassador, whereas as a woman she takes on many roles. *He* is accepted in the masculine western world the way he is but *she* needs to pretend and try to fit in. The language and Orlando's pattern of thought also change after the sex-change: the multiplicity of expressions is strongly present in the last chapters of the novel. The male narrator is frustrated with this kind of thinking: "[T]he truth is that when we write of a woman, everything is out of place – culminations and perorations; the accent never falls where it does with a man" (*Orlando* 297-298). However, this multiplicity of expressions and preoccupations can be seen as a positive thing. Only as a woman does Orlando mature and the life *she* lives seems much richer in experiences than *his* life that is full of action.

The multiple selves Orlando acquires seem, as remarked by Bowlby, specifically feminine (Introduction xlii). They are in contrast with the narrator's wish of "everything to be in its place, with predictable ends and conclusions in language, narratives, and behaviour" (Bowlby, Introduction xlii). In Bowlby's view *Orlando* suggests that "it might be easier from the place of someone identified as a woman to imagine that values and views and selves are not necessarily, or even desirably, 'composed' in the way that the biographer would have it" (Introduction xliii). These different selves also suggest the cyclical nature of life. The selves return to a person at their own logic and cannot be consciously recalled:

> [T]hese selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter's hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own, call them what you will (and for many of these things there is no name) so that one will only come if it is raining, another in a room with green curtains, another when Mrs Jones is not there, another if you can promise it a glass of wine – and so on; for everybody can multiply from his own experience the different terms which his different selves have made with him – and some are too wildly ridiculous to be mentioned in print at all. (*Orlando* 294)

The narrator comments on Orlando's attempt to find the one true self, which "is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all" (*Orlando* 296). As Orlando seeks and calls for the self she wants, all the other selves come to her in succession and leave the narrator lamenting the different perorations of a woman:

> But (here another self came skipping over the top of her mind like the beam from a lighthouse). Fame! (She laughed.) Fame! Seven editions. A prize. […] we must snatch space to remark how discomposing it is for her biographer that this culmination to which the whole book moved, this peroration with which the book was to end, should be dashed from us on a laugh casually like this. (*Orlando* 297)

Here the narrator is returning to his declaration in the beginning of the book that a biography should end with "whatever seat it may be that is the height of their desire" (*Orlando* 14). Earlier he has been deprived of the traditional progression from glory to glory by Orlando's change of sex. Just when the male Orlando has achieved highest possible honours, he falls into a trance and wakes up as a woman. It is as if the narrative of the male Orlando has reached a dead-end in the high honour of Dukedom and in order for his/her life and the narrative to continue, Orlando must become a woman. The cyclical nature of Orlando's life becomes apparent when she returns to England and Archduchess Harriet whose attentions Orlando has fled to Constantinople returns as Archduke Harry. Orlando as a woman must deal with the unwanted advances of the Archduke. On Orlando's return to England the servants in the country estate are also the same ones as before and they accept Orlando's changed gender without much confusion: "Mrs Grisditch [said] to Mr Dupper that night, if her Lord was a Lady now, she had never seen a lovelier one, nor was there a penny piece to choose between them" (*Orlando* 163). In other words, when Orlando returns to England as a woman, her life and the biography start a new cycle.

Woolf uses Orlando's literary ambitions throughout the novel to underline how the gender of the writer affects their opportunities to write. As Spiropoulou points out, Orlando as a Jacobean young man is a prolific writer without literary acclaim (Spiropoulou 82). As

a woman Orlando still desires to write but has to accept the role of a mere muse and patroness. She pours out tea for Pope, Addison, and Swift and reflects on how

> the whole ceremony of pouring out tea is a curious one. A woman knows very well that, though a wit sends her his poems, praises her judgement, solicits her criticism, and drinks her tea, this by no means signifies that he respects her opinions, admires her understanding, or will refuse, though the rapier is denied him, to run her through the body with his pen. (*Orlando* 204-205)

Orlando still wants to write and she is finally able to do so after she gets married to Shelmerdine. The spirit of the age has prevented her writing by making her ring-finger tingle. After her marriage "[s]he was certainly feeling more herself. Her finger had not tingled once, or nothing to count, since [the wedding]" (*Orlando* 252). Orlando is still unsure if the marriage is enough: "She was married, true; but if one's husband was always sailing round Cape Horn, was it marriage? If one liked him, was it marriage? If one liked other people, was it marriage? And finally, if one still wished, more than anything in the whole world, to write poetry, was it marriage?" (*Orlando* 252). There seems to be some hope for the women writers in the present: Orlando becomes a recognized author and even wins a literary prize. As Spiropoulou writes: "By reviewing history through the perspective and the prospects of a woman writer, Woolf seeks to reinstate the feminine in (literary) history and at the same time to demonstrate the fact that historiographical accounts are ineluctably gendered" (82).

Kristeva links the linear world view to masculinity and especially to the European way of thinking (193). She reminds that although cyclical and monumental times are usually linked to femininity, "this repetition and this eternity are found to be the fundamental, if

not the sole, conceptions of time in numerous civilizations and experiences, particularly mystical ones" (192). Stephen Kern also points out the social relativity of time. He writes about the late nineteenth century as follows:

> The sociology and anthropology of that age was full of information about primitive societies with their celebration of the periodic processes of life and the movement of heavenly bodies, their vital dependence on seasonal change and the rhythmic activity of plants and animals, their exotic commemorations of ancestral experience, and their cyclic and apocalyptic visions of history. (19)

This is in unison with Kristeva's idea that cyclical time is not only connected to femininity but also to non-European masculinity (192). In *Orlando* this aspect is shown by the appearance of the gypsies, and their view of the world and their contempt of the European way of life. According to the novel, the gypsies are totally unimpressed by Orlando's heritage of three hundred years and by her big house with its 365 bedrooms. The gypsies do not care about time or property; they have the whole world to live in. I do not think it is a coincidence that Orlando's change of sex occurs at the same time as she is connecting with the gypsies. Both feminine and non-European influences are present together. Similarly, Spiropoulou sees it as significant that the change of sex happens just before Orlando goes to live with the gypsies. In her view this "indirectly connects the position and perspectives of women to those of a cultural minority [...] in addition, it serves to introduce the more open, communal and experimental perspective on life and civilization that women may be said to share with the gypsy nomads" (80). As a woman Orlando understands the gypsies' dismissal of rank and property:

> Looked at from the gipsy point of view, a Duke, Orlando understood, was nothing but a profiteer or robber who snatched land and money from people who rated these things of little worth, and could think of nothing better to do than build three hundred and sixty-five bedrooms when one was enough, and none was even better than one. She could not deny that her ancestors had accumulated field after field; house after house; honour after honour; yet had none of them been saints or heroes, or great benefactors of the human race. (*Orlando* 142-143)

Orlando's life as a man has culminated in high honours, including a Dukedom. After the revolution and change of sex, unceremoniously dressed "in those Turkish coats and trousers which can be worn indifferently by either sex […] riding a donkey, in company of a gipsy, the Ambassador of Great Britain at the Court of the Sultan left Constantinople" (*Orlando* 134-135). At first, Orlando is enjoying the contrast between the daily lives of the gypsies to her former life as the Ambassador visiting other dignitaries and handling official documents:

> The pleasure of having no documents to seal or sign, no flourishes to make, no calls to pay, was enough. The gipsies followed the grass; when it was grazed down, on they moved again. She washed in streams if she washed at all; no boxes, red, blue, or green, were presented to her; there was not a key, let alone a golden key, in the whole camp; as for 'visiting', the word was unknown. (*Orlando* 135-136)

She quite soon finds out that there is a difference between her and the gypsies. She cannot help being impressed by nature's beauty. The beauty of the Turkish mountains inspires

Orlando to continue her poem "The Oak Tree", while the gypsies have no word for 'beautiful'. Orlando ponders her options: "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" (*Orlando* 144). Orlando is forced to admit that she does not belong with the gypsies but has to return to England and try to adapt to her new situation within the English society.

The meaning of her new gender becomes apparent only on her departure from Turkey. She buys an appropriate outfit for a young English lady and starts to think about her changed situation for the first time: "[U]p 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" (*Orlando* 147). In England, however, Orlando's gender becomes an issue as she is faced with numerous litigations:

> 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 […] All her estates were put in Chancery and her titles pronounced in abeyance while the suits were under litigation. Thus it was in a highly ambiguous condition, uncertain whether she was alive or dead, man or woman, Duke or nonentity, that she posted down to her country seat, where, pending the legal judgement, she had

> the Law's permission to reside in a state of incognito or incognita, as the case might turn out to be. (*Orlando* 161)

The western civilization does not allow her to be ambiguous about her gender but it needs to establish her either as a woman or a man. The dominantly male society is based on rank and wealth and the rules of inheritance make it necessary to determine Orlando's sex, whereas the gypsies do not care about rank or wealth and have little need to think about a person's gender. Perhaps because Orlando has been a man of rank and wealth s/he cannot fully relate to the gypsy culture. She still identifies herself with the cultural inheritance of England and thus has to return and try to negotiate her position in English society.

Kristeva's theory of Women's Time comes across in *Orlando*, especially in its last chapter of "present time". The adult, female Orlando is one with her past and remembers, if not eternity, at least centuries of past life, and she experiences moments of being that bring back powerful memories. These memories that sometimes feel more real than the present moment show how similar life is on an individual level regardless of the historical period. This is clearly linked with Kristeva's argument about female subjectivity being based on repetition and eternity.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* as a critical commentary on time, biography, and history. In the introductory chapter, in addition to presenting the aims and structure of my thesis, I looked at Virginia Woolf as a person and as a writer and introduced my topic, the novel *Orlando*. The novel is sometimes dismissed as a diversion from Woolf's more serious work but it has been my aim in this thesis to show that, although light in tone, *Orlando* provides great material for a serious study of biography, history writing, and modernist conception of time.

Chapter Two of this thesis focused on time in relation to modernism and modernity. In the first section of the chapter I examined modernization and technological change that transformed everyday life in the early twentieth century. Modernization and the technological advancement had a great impact on the way people experienced time. Einstein's theory of relativity and Bergson's theory of time as a flow and duration were among the most influential theories. These theories influenced the modernist writers who wanted to renew the form of novel better to correspond to the changed world around them. In section 2.2 I examined the modernist novel and the way modernist writers dealt with time. For the modernist writers the idea of subjective, private time was an important theme. The idea that time is experienced differently by each individual is linked with the theories of time presented by Einstein and Bergson. The concept of involuntary memory was also introduced in this section. The past of an individual being accessed randomly by sensory stimulus gave writers, such as Proust, the means to write in the order of remembering and not in the order of things happening. Finally, in the third section I studied Virginia Woolf's theories of the modern novel. I introduced her ideas about presenting characters in a new way. Woolf uses the term "moments of being" to describe the emotionally powerful

moments in life that are the lasting memories that can be recalled years later. She uses these moments to build up her characters from within, by giving the reader information about a characters past by means of their memories. For Woolf as for other modernist writers the contrast between public and private time was of utmost importance in constructing their novels.

The third chapter is an analysis of the role of time in *Orlando*. I started by studying the way in which Woolf uses *Orlando* as a platform to experiment with her ideas about biography. The fictional context of Orlando living through centuries and experiencing several historical periods personally gives Woolf the tools to comment on biography and history writing. In *Orlando* she can emphasize the unreliability of history and underline how history is always shaped by the values of those who record it. The second section of the analysis concentrated on Julia Kristeva's theory of Women's Time. I provided a reading of *Orlando* based on Kristeva's argument that female subjectivity is based on repetition and eternity. Linear temporality in Kristeva's view is masculine and specifically Western. The cyclical nature of time comes across in the story as it is not only Orlando who lives for centuries but other characters return as well. This suggests in my opinion that life goes on the same way and people remain essentially the same from generation to generation although their names might change. Furthermore, Orlando's contact with the gypsies in Turkey link the cyclical time to non-European culture.

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* is superficially very different from her other novels, but a closer reading shows that *Orlando* deals with the same themes of time, identity, and memory that Woolf has explored in all her work. In *Orlando* Woolf claims that the difference between public and private time "is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation" (95). While it has been my aim in this thesis to give *Orlando* the fuller investigation it deserves, in further study it would be interesting to take a closer look at the

similarities between *Orlando* and Woolf's other works. For example Julia Briggs claims that *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*, and *A Room of One's Own* form a triptych. She writes that "*To the Lighthouse* explores the problems confronted by the woman artist in a patriarchal society; *Orlando* sets them in their historical perspective; *A Room of One's Own* analyses their source and nature" (*Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* 216). Another interesting comparison would be between *Orlando* and *Jacob's Room*, since both novels focus on the problem of representing a character through biography. Both novels seek to establish a negative answer to the question posed in *Jacob's Room*: "Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?" (27).

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