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## Woolf's Orlando and the Resonances of Trans Studies

By CHRIS COFFMAN

[1] Scholars have recently begun to create theoretical models that help us to register important differences within contemporary transgendered identifications. In 1990, Judith Butler's Gender Trouble denaturalized norms of gender and sexuality, performing a critique of prior feminist work on gender that not only influenced subsequent directions in feminist studies but also initiated queer theory. Yet as Jay Prosser argues in Second Skins, queer theory in the 1990's often deployed gender instability or fluidity as a trope for queer sexualities, a move he finds exemplified in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Tendencies. This tendency to subordinate the study of gender to the study of sexuality and to emphasize the fluidity of both was challenged both by Prosser's book and by Judith Halberstam's Female Masculinity. These books draw attention to desires for bodily transformation and fixed cross-gender identifications that were obscured by the "fluidity" model.

[2] There are important differences between Prosser's and Halberstam's positions, however. Halberstam only partially concurs with Prosser's critique of a kind of postmodern fluidity that would have one making rapid changes in gender presentation from day to day: she allows for "some degree of movement" in gender, especially over long stretches of time (147). Also, although both Prosser and Halberstam situate their work under the banner "transgender," Prosser is principally concerned in Second Skins with transsexuality. Though he critiques Butler's early work for its elision of questions of transsexual embodiment, his argument—upon which Gayle Salamon has recently placed considerable pressure—is very hard to sustain when extended to the broader range of transgender practices, particularly those forms that do not rely on bodily interventions. Halberstam, by contrast, opens up the category "transgender" to include a wider range of embodiments. She argues for the inclusion of butch subjectivity and challenges from numerous angles the implicit hierarchy that privileges the trans-ness of persons that desire or obtain sex reassignment surgery.

[3] Halberstam's broadly conceived idea of "transgender" can be opened up even further within literary and cultural studies. Sandy Stone's pioneering work on transgender performance points to this kind of expansive thinking. In a "posttranssexual manifesto" labeled by the editors of The Transgender Studies Reader as the "protean text from which transgender studies emerged," she argues that in order to counteract the colonization of their bodies by the binary gender system, transsexuals should refuse to "pass" and instead allow their bodies and life histories to be "read" so as to disrupt its terms (Stryker and Whittle 221). Similarly, anthropologist Jason Cromwell has observed that sex reassignment surgery works to "queer" trans bodies and desires, including not only binary notions of sex and gender but also conceptualizations of "homosexuality,"



“heterosexuality,” and “bisexuality,” which only make sense with regard to non-transgendered bodies and life histories (515). Taking this even further, psychoanalyst-in-training Griffin Hansbury draws useful (though of course rough and contestable) distinctions between different varieties of what he calls the “transmasculine identities”: the men he calls the “woodworkers” seek to blend into normatively gendered life after sex reassignment; the “transmen” transition into masculine embodiments but will (to some degree) publicly identify as trans; and the “genderqueers” scramble gender signals and sometimes forego medical intervention, seeking to disrupt others’ perceptions of their gender.

[4] Hansbury’s distinctions point to the co-existence of multiple forms of transgender. They also suggest that along with the destabilization of gender effected within theory by Butler’s work has come a theoretical basis for understanding the proliferation of new ways of “doing” gender, even though Gender Trouble itself—as Kathleen Chapman and Michael DuPlessis point out— places more emphasis on the subversion of binary gender than on the production of new genders (Chapman and Duplessis 237). This proliferation of contemporary genders has only recently begun to register within the fields of literary and cultural studies. The term “genderqueer” has been in circulation within queer and trans communities for a number of years now, but has yet to catch on in academic gender theory despite its potential for refocusing attention on gender— rather than on sexuality—as the site of queering. This queering is as much a means of enacting and living non-dominant genders as it is of undercutting the hegemonic modes that they challenge. I seek to renew attention to these queer modes of transgender—not as a means of asserting their superiority to forms of trans subjectivity that are more invested in asserting the right to occupy one half of the gender binary, but rather as a means of opening up the territory of transgender literary and cultural studies to questions that have gone unposed by both Prosser and Halberstam.

[5] This project of opening up territory is particularly urgent given the turf wars that have taken place over which texts we might call the objects of trans studies. What Halberstam and C. Jacob Hale call the “butch/FTM border wars” have played out over the status of Radclyffe Hall’s realist novel The Well of Loneliness, which is variably claimed as the object of lesbian, transgender, and transsexual studies. Virginia Woolf’s Orlando is a very different case. A good deal of debate has taken place in the work of Kirstie Blair, Lillian Faderman, Sherron Knopp, Elizabeth Meese, Adam Parkes, George Piggford, Victoria L. Smith, Karyn Z. Sproles, and Joanne Winning (to name only a few) about the novel’s treatment of lesbianism. A smaller number of scholars—most notably, Karen Kaivola and Jean Kennard—situate the novel’s trajectories of female same-sex desire in the context of the protagonist’s attraction to both men and women. While some of this work presents the novel’s use of gender fluidity as a trope that figures sexuality, Stef Craps and Jennifer A. Smith view this fluidity as a transgender practice. Prosser, by contrast, dismisses Orlando as irrelevant to trans studies because its protagonist’s transition takes place through fantastic means (Second Skins, 168).

[6] At stake in these turf wars is, on the one hand, a question

concerning the way in which literature and other cultural products register gender and sexuality. Yet, on the other hand, a question concerning history also presses: how are we to read texts from the past in conjunction with the concerns of the present? Contemporary formations of transgender identities differ from their historical antecedents because of their divergent discursive contexts. The sexological category of “inversion” that was current in the early twentieth century folded together what we now consider to be two separate factors, gender identity and sexual orientation. The Well of Loneliness and Orlando, both from 1920’s England, engage in a rhetoric that enables them simultaneously to play to and to exceed the official discourses on gender and sexuality of their day (in the case of The Well), and even to sidestep them outright (in the case of Orlando). In reading both of these texts from the perspective of the present day, the critic’s choice of terms of identity or anti-identity implicates the act of criticism and historical reconstruction in contemporary “turf wars.” Even though the concept of “inversion” is no longer current, both novels resonate with present-day identities and so remain productive touchstones for contemporary questions about gender.

[7] The Well is a realist novel that tracks the life of Stephen Gordon, a strongly masculine, female-bodied person whose struggle to define herself in the context of upper-class English country life ultimately leads to her exile from her family’s country estate and to her moves to London and to Paris, where—though still unhappy—she finds others like herself. Because The Well explicitly connects Stephen’s subjectivity to the early twentieth-century sexological category of “inversion” and makes it a key element of plot, in the last few decades Hall’s novel has been a frequent object of “turf wars.” Scholars have correlated Stephen’s character both to contemporary butches and to contemporary transsexuals, the latter of whom have benefited from access to techniques for sex reassignment that existed but that were neither well developed nor widely available during Hall’s time. (Prosser notes that late 19th- and early 20th-century sexological texts contain evidence of surgical interventions “as early as 1882,” though they were not common [Second Skins 141]). For example, Esther Newton reads Stephen Gordon as the “mythic mannish lesbian,” Halberstam reads Stephen as a transgender butch whose gender identity cannot fully be contained by the “lesbian” label (75-110), and Prosser reads Stephen as a proto-transsexual (Second Skins 135-169). Acknowledged throughout these debates is the ultimate irreducibility of Hall’s book and of Stephen’s character to simplistic categories of identity.

[8] Rather than continue this struggle over classification, I prefer to use the example of The Well and its critical reception to make several observations about the implications of these debates.

[9] First, at stake in readings of The Well is what Alan Sinfield has identified as a struggle over the relative priority of sexual orientation and gender identity as axes of historical inquiry. As historian Nan Alamilla Boyd shows, “turf wars” that turn on the struggle between these two rubrics have animated, for example, the debates over whether so-called “passing women” were masquerading lesbians or transgendered men. These skirmishes are quite similar to those that have taken place over The Well. The question of whether to

prioritize gender identity or sexual identity in reading Hall's text is not settled, and is rendered more complex than in historical inquiries because of the novel's status as fiction.

[10] Second, the dominance of realism in The Well has made the novel particularly tempting for those in search of fictional analogues to 'real inverts,' 'real lesbians,' and 'real transpeople.' This move runs throughout the scholarship that reads the novel through the rubrics of 'inversion,' 'lesbianism,' 'transgenderism,' and 'transsexuality.' However, the analogical approach is most evident in Prosser's reading of Hall in Second Skins, which compares Stephen Gordon's narrative to those displayed in transsexual and proto-transsexual autobiographies. While there are a number of similarities between those texts, there are two difficulties with Prosser's argument. First, his assumption that transsexual autobiographies are true and unmediated statements of subjectivity is a problem because transsexuals sometimes shape their life narratives to fit within the 'born-in-the-wrong-body' framework that medical practitioners recognize as treatable within the Harry Benjamin standards of care, as Stone—among others—observes (Stone 228). Second, Prosser's approach leads him to privilege realism. Though he persuasively demonstrates that both fiction and non-fiction emphasize the importance of the desire for bodily realness in transsexual subjectivity, his unremarked privileging of realism as a literary genre leads him to limit the scope of transgender studies by excluding more experimental texts that challenge narrative conventions.

[11] In contrast to The Well, Woolf's 1928 Orlando features a protagonist who lives from the Elizabethan age through to the Modern era, and—as the result of an unanticipated and unexplained transformation—experiences both male and female embodiments. Going beyond Woolf's strategy in stream-of-consciousness novels such as Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse of shuttling between male characters' and female characters' different perspectives, Orlando uses the genre of the fantastic to explore the perspective of a person who has lived both as a man and as a woman. Even more, while a woman, Orlando frequently circulates in public in men's clothes, often while pursuing women. At first blush it would seem that these crossings of sex and gender would closely affiliate Orlando with transgender studies. However, unlike Hall's novel, Woolf's has been claimed both by feminist theory and by a queer theory that privileges sexuality, but has largely been policed away as an inappropriate object for trans studies.

[12] Starting in the 1990's, feminist and queer scholars frequently cited Orlando as an example of the potential of modernist experimentation to open up a space for the elliptical articulation of fluid genders and desires. This reading finds its best evidence in Orlando's cross-dressed erotic pursuits. However, the text's popularity has been on the wane at the turn of the century as the paradigms of queer studies that were introduced in the early 1990's have been challenged by those of transgender studies. In the introduction to Palatable Poison, their collection of essays on The Well, Prosser and Laura Doan argue that a critical emphasis both on linguistic experimentation and on gender fluidity in the 1990's placed a premium on experimental texts such as Orlando

and Djuna Barnes's Nightwood yet devalued Hall's realism (18-20). In his own Second Skins, Prosser goes on to argue that unlike Hall's protagonist Stephen Gordon, who suffers the constraints of the body and of realistic narrative time, Woolf's defiance of realism in Orlando leaves her protagonist "free to move beyond h/er body" and to "break through the limits of the flesh" as "h/er narrative propels h/er through four centuries of history" (168). Implicit in this assessment is the assumption that Hall's realism gives her novel the ability to represent the dilemmas of proto-transgendered subjects in a way that Woolf's fantastic defiance of realism cannot.

[13] Prosser is right that Orlando is not the exact equivalent of a male-to-female transsexual; Woolf's use of the fantastic takes the novel in a different direction. Though Orlando fantasmatically changes from male to female partway through the narrative, h/er body always fits within the morphological confines of binary sex. After being unambiguously male, Orlando becomes unambiguously female, without any of the physical features that would characterize a male-to-female transsexual. Orlando does not share Hall's emphasis on its protagonist's persistent sense of being ill at ease with one's gender assignment or embodiment. Nor is Woolf's narrative driven by a plot in which the protagonist's process of self-recognition prompts either the desire to take up a fixed gender presentation that is dissonant with bodily sex, or the desire for and pursuit of transsexual transition.

[14] However, Prosser's strong preference for realism over other forms of fiction limits the scope of transgender studies to only those texts that present a teleological narrative that tracks the protagonist's identification of and process of acting upon a long-held, internal sense of gender identity. As important as it is to acknowledge the specificity of narratives of these kinds of transsexual longings and of persistent (rather than fluid) cross-gender identifications, not all forms of transsexual subjectivity follow Prosser's model. Nor is realism the only suitable literary strategy. Stone, for example, challenges the "wrong body" narrative and argues for a postmodern stance that defies genre. Placing texts such as Orlando altogether outside of the territory of transgender studies thus limits our understanding of the diversity of twentieth- and twenty-first-century genders and desires. As Craps observes, Orlando's life history falls outside of the "dominant conception of gender in Western societies" that "presupposes a causal relation between sex, gender, and desire" (175). Woolf's novel deviates even further from this model by sidestepping teleological narratives of gender and sexual identity-formation altogether. Refusing a plot focused on realized or thwarted transgender longings, the novel presents multiple explanations for Orlando's change of embodiment and leaves the truth-value of each undecidable. This defiance of the logic of causality that drives realist narrative is a postmodern textual strategy that distinguishes Woolf's approach to the relationship between desire, gender, and embodiment from that of realist works such as The Well of Loneliness.

[15] Thus, while acknowledging the difference in emphasis between teleological narratives and the postmodern fantasia of Woolf's Orlando, I argue that Woolf's experimentalism involves not so much an escapist evasion of the question of embodiment as it does a

critical interrogation of it. Woolf's novel uses its protagonist's involuntary and fantasmatically produced transformation to interrogate neither the events leading up to it nor the experience of the process of transition, but rather some of its consequences for the experience of subjectivity and desire. By tracking Orlando's divergent experiences as a man and a woman across several periods in English history, Orlando considers both the implications of the persistence of memories of one's past sex after transition and some of the psychological changes involved in coming to inhabit a body or a gender identity that is subject to different social expectations than those of the sex of one's birth. There remain some temporal and psychological differences between Orlando's experience and those of transsexuals, however. Orlando's physical transformation is a singular event rather than an extended process, and s/he does not consciously wish for changes in embodiment before they happen. Nonetheless, Orlando poses questions about subjectivity that are similar to those explored in much writing on contemporary transgendered persons.

[16] Woolf's novel, however, examines these issues by inverting the narrative of being at odds with one's embodiment. Orlando does not begin the novel ill at ease with his status as male; rather, she begins to question her gender after she has become female. Because of this "inverted" plotting, Orlando has heretofore largely been rejected as irrelevant to transgender studies. Woolf's strategy of sidestepping the medical discourses on sexuality and gender of her day—a maneuver that is evident as well in other parts of Orlando—places her narrative in an inverted rather than a direct position with respect to the very discourse of "inversion" that Hall's novel hinges upon and that has allowed it to be claimed for transgender studies.

[17] Pamela Caughie observes that Orlando is a "text about writing, about constructing lives, histories, identities, and fictions" (41-2). Its narrator's discourse performs an indeterminacy that highlights the arbitrary nature of a linguistic system in which "[o]ne must assume a" position within the binary logic of sexual difference "in order to take one's place in language" (41-2). Along with Makiko Minow-Pinkney and Toril Moi, Caughie draws on poststructuralist theory to reframe an extended debate about androgyny initiated by Woolf's 1929 A Room of One's Own and further developed by Elaine Showalter, Hermione Lee, Herbert Marder, Maria DiBattista, and Nancy Topping Bazin. Though the concept of "androgyny" itself does not advance an understanding of the relevance of Orlando to transgender studies, Caughie's article is nonetheless helpful for its focus on the interweaving of the narrator's and Orlando's desires in the text's treatment of sex. She argues that the novel's "desire is for expression itself," and that its fulfillment of desire "encourages us to read" its protagonist's gender "in terms of the situation of desire, the subject's situation in a signifying chain" in a system in which "[o]ne must assume a sexual identity in order to take one's place in language" (42). However, Caughie's article does not go far enough in pointing to Woolf's critique of what Lacanian psychoanalysts would call 'sexual difference.' Instead, Caughie retains the Lacanian model, albeit in a displaced form, as she fetishizes the "indeterminacy" of Orlando's "oscillation" between the two poles of binary 'sexual difference' (44). This leads her to describe "androgyny, transvestism, and transsexualism" alike as "metaphors

for sexual identity” in a formulation that conflates sex [transsexualism] with gender [androgyny, transvestism] (47). Far from unfixing ‘sexual difference,’ her argument upholds it as the two poles between which Orlando vacillates even in h/er “refusal to choose” between them (44).

[18] Drawing on Caughie’s emphasis on the text’s undecidability but pushing beyond the poles of Lacanian ‘sexual difference,’ I contend that not only the novel’s language but also its narrative style are strategically indeterminate in accounting for Orlando’s shifts in sex and gender. After Orlando’s spontaneous change in sex, the narrator explicitly refuses to speculate on the reasons for the transformation. Self-consciously taking “advantage of” a “pause in the narrative,” he comments on the way in which Orlando retains the same face and identity after becoming a woman, and remains possessed of all of her memories of her life as a man. However, she refuses to join in the speculations of those who wish to posit a logical explanation (138). Such accounts offer narrative antecedents that would plausibly explain Orlando’s transformation, but the narrator resists this causal reasoning, leaving it to “biologists and psychologists” to “treat of sex and sexuality.” Describing them as “odious” matters that ostensibly lie outside of the responsibility of the biographer, the narrator slyly circumscribes the questions of how and why one comes to occupy given positions within structures of sex, gender, and desire (139). By avoiding these topics, the narrator declares an intention to sidestep the early twentieth-century sexological discourse of “inversion” that would read Orlando’s transformation as the manifestation of an inner femaleness. This effectively steers clear of the more contemporary debate between essentialist and social constructionist accounts of sex, gender, and sexuality as well. On one level, this rhetorical parrying works to present the question of essentialism as undecided. Yet on another level, the narrator’s insistence on avoiding questions of origins and essences is an anti-essentialist move that figures them as impertinent.

[19] This parrying continues in a later passage in which the narrator claims to stage a debate between essentialism and social constructionism, breaking from recounting the details of Orlando’s life to engage in an extended meditation on the cause of her gradual assumption of the purportedly “feminine” qualities of modesty and vanity (187). The narrator introduces three different accounts of the relationship between what we now call “sex” and “gender”: at one moment, “it is clothes that wear us and not we them” (in other words, gender constructs sex); at another, “clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath” (that is, gender expresses an essential sex); at a third, “In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what is above” (in other words, people are essentially androgynous) (188-189). The narrator appears to endorse the idea that there is an essential sex that is androgynous, claiming that “it was this mixture in [Orlando] of man and woman... that often gave her conduct an unexpected turn.” However, he can stake that claim only by setting aside the “general question” of the actual relationship between Orlando’s female body and her behavior, and by focusing instead on what he calls the “odd effect” of that

behavioral evidence of her androgynous “vacillation” (189, emphasis added). This argumentative hedge performs a circular logic that rhetorically installs “sex” as the ground of the long list of “effects” that follows. However one might become distracted by the exercise of contrasting Orlando’s ostensibly “male” disinterest in clothing, knowledge about farming, and enthusiasm for drinking with her supposedly “female” disinterest in power, fear of danger, propensity to crying, and ignorance of mathematics and geography, one is left in suspended uncertainty. Is Orlando “most man or woman,” as the narrator asks (189-190)? Is “sex” even a plausible ground for understanding human behavior at all (189-190)? As the narrator finally admits, “It is difficult to say and cannot now be decided,” nor will it be later in the narrative (190). What seems to be an earnest debate over the origins of human behavior turns out yet again to be an elaborate tease, and right after declaring the matter undecided, the narrator returns to recounting Orlando’s adventures.

[20] This series of self-conscious refusals to posit a cause for the most significant transformations in Orlando’s life constitutes a postmodern approach to the body and to storytelling that makes Woolf’s novel a different kind of narrative than those that Prosser analyzes in Second Skins. Orlando avoids the plot in which the desire for transition or for a gender presentation that goes against dominant cultural expectations is clearly identified as the antecedent of a process of change. Instead, the novel sets multiple explanations of Orlando’s transformation in motion without deciding upon a singular account. Orlando refuses to require narrative coherence or the positing of an essential gender identity to make sense of its protagonist’s subjectivity, and instead embraces plurality and contradiction. Indeed, as Nancy Cervetti argues, Orlando uses fantasy to “invert...all the techniques of formal realism” and to question one of its core characterological principles: “the whole notion of...core identity” (175). Though portions of her argument are problematic for their reliance on claims about transsexual essentialism drawn from Marjorie Garber’s heavily criticized chapter on transsexuality in Vested Interests, Cervetti’s view of the novel as challenging the formulation of identity as an “inside” is helpful. She draws on Butler’s account in Gender Trouble of gender as both established and subverted through the force of repetition—an argument that takes aim at Robert Stoller’s identitarian notion of a “gender core” and suggests that Orlando is most closely aligned with non-identitarian forms of transgender (Butler 24).

[21] Yet the novel’s anti-essentialist, anti-identitarian embrace of multiplicity does not entail a continual oscillation between binaries that refuses all fixity, as Caughie implies. As Cervetti argues, the text certainly “mocks its own pursuit of Orlando, its own attempt to pin him down, to know the biographical facts of her life and define her essential person,” rendering “any attempt to define Orlando’s identity...useless” (175). Though Orlando does present its protagonist’s “subjectivity as multiple and shifting,” as Cervetti observes, many of Orlando’s shifts in behavior take place over a long period of time—a fact generally ignored in readings that valorize h/er as an icon of postmodern unfixity (175). Even Craps’s transgender reading of Orlando finally founders in its embrace of an “androgyny” in which gender “is fluid and multiple” (184). The novel does embrace plurality and contradiction, but it does not do so

through what Caughie calls an utopian “refusal to choose” between male and female, masculine and feminine (44). Rather, the novel uses the fantastic to foreground the slow pacing of Orlando’s shifts in gender presentation and comportment. Excepting her physical transformation and her moments of cross-dressing, Orlando changes over the course of several centuries in response to historically specific, material shifts. These are not rapid reversals in day-to-day performances, but rather refusals to use narrative to create a coherent sense of the development of a singular identity over realistic time.

[22] As Hansbury’s and Stone’s work suggests, the “inversion” or “wrong body” narrative is no longer the only model invoked to account for contemporary transgender identities. The strategy of indeterminacy at work in Woolf’s novel resonates with what Hansbury calls the “genderqueer” stance of unsettling expectations about gender. Whereas genderqueers disrupt the binary gender system in the visual realm by challenging spectators’ expectations about their appearance, Orlando disrupts the system in the textual realm by thwarting readers’ assumptions about the coherence of life narratives. In this, Woolf positions her protagonist much as Stone positions present-day transsexuals: “not as a class or problematic ‘third gender,’ but rather as a genre—a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desires has yet to be explored” (231). There are, of course, significant differences between the fantastically transformed Orlando and contemporary transgendered and transsexual persons. Orlando’s body and self-presentation are readily accepted as female and feminine, so they do not visibly unsettle the gender binary targeted by Hansbury’s “genderqueers.” It is not so much Orlando’s body as h/er life history that disrupts past and present discourses of sexuality and gender.

[23] Therefore, I prefer to read Orlando for its resonances with contemporary transgender narratives instead of taking its embrace of the fantastic and reversal of teleological narrative trajectories as reasons to circumscribe the text as completely irrelevant to transgender studies. Pioneers in transgender studies such as Prosser have, out of necessity, emphasized the role of narrative in fleshing out transgender subjectivity. As the editors of The Transgender Studies Reader’s marking of Stone’s “The Empire Strikes Back” as the initiating text of transgender studies suggests, one of the most important political moves within the field to date has been to assert that transgendered people should speak back to institutions and official discourses. Because transsexual people usually need the approval of the medical establishment in order to obtain sex reassignment, psychologists’ and physicians’ criteria have exerted a strong influence on clinical and academic understandings of transgender subjectivity (230-2). Stone and Prosser underscore transgendered persons’ ability to challenge and to revise official narratives for their own purposes. Their work—along with Halberstam’s books and Viviane K. Namaste’s Invisible Lives—counters earlier scholarship that either pathologized transgendered people or presented them as constructed entirely by the medical establishment and so as lacking in agency. Woolf’s Orlando does not offer this kind of revision. Instead, it provides strategic evasions of institutional attempts to stabilize gender

identity. In positioning Orlando as relevant to transgender studies, then, I contend that Orlando's situation and the text's rhetorical strategy reverberate with those of contemporary transgendered people without being equivalent to them.

[24] Here I draw on Wai Chee Dimock's "A Theory of Resonance," which argues that the reverberations of literary texts extend and transmute their significance across widely diverse historical and geographical quarters. Dimock argues that when texts move "across space and...across time," they "run into new semantic networks, new ways of imputing meaning" that make a text "continually interpretable" within new contexts (1061). Dimock's theory challenges the common critical practice of fixing meaning within texts' original historical and semantic contexts, and opens them up for a democratic contestation of meaning that "authoriz[es] contrary readings across the ages" (1067). Dimock's emphasis is on the varied semantic resonances that literary language takes on across time, but her theory can be reworked to address more broadly discursive reverberations as well. Queer theorists such as Carolyn Dinshaw, Jonathan Goldberg, and Kate Thomas have drawn on this notion to analyze what Thomas calls "the resonances that both produce and emanate from queer alliances between cross-temporal texts" (333). Goldberg, writing against mainstream gay politics, observes that such a methodology "allows connections to 'our' past that are not tied to identitarian narratives" (xii). While these three scholars' focus is on discourses of sexuality, their methodology can be extended to discourses of gender. The fantastic premise of Orlando itself works to mobilize cross-historical reverberations by landing its protagonist in different historical settings, bodies, and genders. It thus makes sense to investigate its resonances with contemporary formations of gender as well.

[25] This process of seeking cross-historical reverberations involves setting Woolf's novel beside contemporary discourses of transgender, rather than presuming it fully to be assimilable to them. In this, my approach owes a debt to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's argument in Touching Feeling for the benefits of thinking about what it means to set texts "beside" each other. "Beside," for Sedgwick, "comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations" (8). Thinking about what it means to "beside" thus opens up productive questions about the meaning of proximity without assuming equivalence. By allowing one to consider similarities among members of disparate groups or among different discourses without conflating or appropriating them, thinking the "beside" is a particularly productive way of thinking about the resonances between contemporary identity-based formations and earlier configurations of desire, gender, and embodiment. The scholarship on the "butch/FTM border wars" implicitly takes this kind of approach, as the metaphor of the "border" presupposes a relation of "beside." In Female Masculinity, for example, Halberstam examines overlaps between female, transgendered, and transsexual masculinities even as she observes important differences between them. However, her penchant for categorization—evident as well in Prosser's introductory essay entitled "Transgender"—focuses on proliferating different boxes for identity, a move that engenders struggles over

classification and focuses scholarly attention on the policing of boundaries. The “border wars” over Hall’s The Well are particularly instructive on the limits of such an approach: they demonstrate the circularity involved in beginning with a contemporary identity—whether “lesbian,” “transgender butch,” or “transsexual”—and then seeking evidence for precursors of that identity in a text whose embrace of the discourse of “inversion” overlaps with them all. I note this circularity not to invalidate the project of identifying historical precursors of contemporary formations of identity—which has the beneficial effect of enabling historical work on marginalized sexualities and genders—but rather to observe that it is more productive to take a “both/and” rather than an “either/or” approach to these readings, all of which Hall’s novel sustains.

[26] I also note the constructive circularity of Halberstam’s and Prosser’s identity-based approaches in order to observe that Orlando presents a somewhat different but equally productive opportunity to think the “beside.” Much scholarship on Orlando has foundered by assimilating the novel to a logic of identity—by asserting that all of its rhetorical multivalence is a disguise for a coherent identity that the critic then proceeds to unearth. This is most evident in efforts to demonstrate, often on biographical grounds, that the novel’s polyvocal narrative is nothing but an elaborate screen for lesbian desire. Orlando is particularly compelling as both the provocation to and the limit of such readings: it teases its readers by coming close to categories of identity while refusing fully to inhabit them. It points to ways of thinking of the history of gender identification—and, perhaps, disidentification—that resonate with past and present gender identities without being restricted by them.

[27] However, being “beside” is not necessarily conducive to peaceful relations—as Sedgwick emphasizes by referencing the aggression that often exists between siblings compelled to share a bed (Touching Feeling 8). Indeed, the tensions between “queer studies” and “transgender studies”—at least as they have thus far been practiced—stand as evidence of the difficulty of negotiating a terrain that involves both proximity and difference. Similarly, the very ability of Orlando to exceed identity categories and to sustain multiple interpretations creates dissonance not only between critics with divergent views of the novel, but also between individual critics and the text. Precisely because it slyly eschews realistic temporality in order to evoke and then to exceed historically specific identities, Orlando continues to be a useful touchstone for contemporary questions about sex and gender. By shifting from the use of “sexuality” as a framework for understanding Orlando to the use of “gender” as the primary rubric, one can see that the novel’s traversals of sex and gender do not merely serve as figures for homosexuality. Rather, they reverberate with contemporary formations of transgender as well.

[28] Shifting to a lens focused on “gender” also recontextualizes Orlando in a manner that suggests the possibilities of what recently have been called “trans-feminisms”: strategic alliances between feminist and transgender politics. Like “genderqueer,” the term “trans-feminism” thus far has gained more traction in the popular press than in academia. Along with an article by Gayle Salamon,

the recent publication of Krista Scott-Dixon's anthology Trans/forming Feminisms marks the most extensive intervention to date. (Articles by C. L. Cole and Shannon L. C. Cate; C. Jacob Hale; Cressida Heyes; Naomi Scheman; and Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore—as well as books by Butler and Halberstam and a 2004 “GLQ Forum”—also explore the intersection of transgender and feminist issues without using the label “trans-feminism.”) Orlando engages similar concerns. Though Jane de Gay, Marder, and Nicola J. Watson assign priority to the novel's feminist themes and present its treatment of transgender phenomena as subordinate, it can alternatively be read as highlighting the interlocking oppression of women, transgendered people, and sexual minorities. As Butler observes in Undoing Gender, contemporary efforts to proliferate new genders take place in the context of a field of legibility constituted by existent, though malleable, norms. Orlando explores the effects that sexist cultural norms have on its protagonist's gender and desire as s/he lives in both male and female bodies and in several periods of English history.

[29] Citing Naomi Schor, Robyn Wiegman traces the advent of feminist gender studies to Sedgwick's Between Men, which draws on the conceptual tools of feminist theory developed under the rubric of women's studies to analyze circuits of male homosocial and homosexual desire in English literature. Noteworthy here is that Sedgwick's book is both an important development within gay and lesbian studies and an initiating text of gender studies. For Wiegman, transgender studies emerges from this same intellectual trajectory when Stone's “The Empire Strikes Back” stakes a claim for transgendered people within feminist theory and culture in response to lesbian-feminist censure of her hire at Olivia Records. Stryker's introduction to The Transgender Studies Reader, which also identifies Stone's essay as engaging feminist theory, offers an extended survey of ruptures and continuities between transgender and feminist work. Transgender studies stands with feminist and queer studies in deploying and challenging conceptual distinctions between “sex,” “gender,” and “sexuality.” As Wiegman argues, “feminism is not the scene of a seamless identification between so-called women and women but is crisscrossed and overwritten by a whole range of disidentifications, incongruities, and remappings of the material (bodies and identities) that it has taken as its primary knowledge-objects” (379). Because of this, feminism “finally is not bound to any prescribed domain of gender's complex universe” (379). Wiegman's statements about feminism aptly describe the polyvocal engagement of sex, gender, and desire at work in Orlando as well. It thus makes sense to view Woolf's novel as a terrain on which the overlapping concerns of feminist and transgender studies can be negotiated simultaneously.

[30] One way to do so is by considering the novel's treatment of Orlando's sexuality in light of h/her history as both a man and a woman. As Cromwell and Stone observe, transgendered bodies and life histories complicate identitarian accounts of sexuality. Orlando calls attention to similar matters by tracking the trajectories of desire that its protagonist experiences as a man and a woman: first, for Sasha, a Russian woman who initially appears to the male Orlando as masculine; second, for Shelbourne, a seafaring Englishman who

appears to the female Orlando as feminine. These people initially appeal because they are deliciously transgendered, in the broadest sense of the term. In both of these cases, Orlando's desires seem heterosexual because of their parties' sexed embodiment. However, h/er desires are queer because they are initiated by the lure of gender ambiguity and defy the assumption that desire must always flow between masculine and feminine. Orlando's desires as a woman are also queered by her past history as a man. Yet at these moments, Orlando cannot—as Prosser would have it—transcend the consequences of h/er sexed embodiment, despite h/er fantastical transformation at other points in the narrative. Nor does an utopian fluidity allow Orlando to transcend social constructions of gender and sexuality. Rather, s/he is left to grapple both with the queerness of h/er desires and with socially imposed prohibitions and inequities concerning gender and sexuality.

[31] One curb on the free play of gender and desire comes from the novel's emphasis on the effects of the patriarchal aspects of English culture. These include what Sedgwick, in Between Men, argues to be a form of masculinity that depends upon homophobic disavowal. We can see such a denial at work in Orlando, whose protagonist "enjoy[s] the love of both sexes equally" only while a woman who remembers her life as a man (221). While attending a carnival upon the frozen River Thames, the male Orlando is drawn to a "figure, which, whether boy's or woman's," he finds to be of "extraordinary seductiveness" and that will prove to be that of his first love (37). Turning from "boy-boy" to "boy-girl" and back again much as the mysterious figure skates by and then returns to come closer, Orlando's passion defies the presupposition that desire can only flow between masculine and feminine. Moreover, his desire in this scene is both sexual and epistemological. From a distance, the "speed and vigor" of the skating leave no doubt in Orlando's mind that the seductive figure is male (38). However, from a closer vantage point, the figure's masculine "legs, hands, [and] carriage" are put into relief by her feminine mouth, breasts, and eyes (38). After "sweeping a curtsy with the utmost grace to the King"—that is, ending her masculine "speed and vigor" with a feminine flourish—the skater stops directly in front of Orlando, revealing herself to be a woman (38). Though the initial queerness of Sasha's gender is her lure throughout this scene, ascertaining her sex is decisive in fixing Orlando's affection. Despite the narrator's subsequent claim that "In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place," the male Orlando never shifts into an identification with the feminine position as he desires Sasha; his self-positioning as a masculine male remains fixed throughout the scene (189). As enamored as Orlando is of the boyish Sasha, he considers the possibility of her being male to be reason that "all embraces [would be] out of the question," so he is quite relieved to discover her a woman (38). That the prospect of homosexual acts is unthinkable for the male Orlando is further suggested when he departs for Turkey in order to flee an individual that identifies herself as a Roumanian: the "Archduchess Harriet Griselda of Finster-Aarhorn and Scandop-Boom" (114). As Orlando discovers upon her return to England, the "Archduchess" is male (178). Though the male Orlando experiences desire for ambiguously gendered persons, the queerness of his passion nonetheless remains latent.

[32] If as a man, Orlando's willingness to act on queer desire is limited by homophobic prohibitions, as a woman her body renders her subject to constraints on female mobility, and even to laws that question her status as a subject. It is thus not true that Orlando is "free to move beyond h/er body," as Prosser claims (*Second Skins* 168). Woolf's use of the fantastic enables her protagonist to change sex, and therefore to transcend the technological limitations of the early twentieth century. However, the novel's feminist polemic is directed at exposing the constraints placed upon Orlando when she comes to inhabit a female body, just as the sections on the male Orlando highlight the constraints placed by homophobia on his desires.

[33] Both Orlando's encounters with English law and her everyday experiences show that her transformation into a woman under a patriarchal ideological regime brings a new set of inequities. Newly female, Woolf's protagonist quickly learns that the feminine "graces" he had so admired as a man take hours of "tedious discipline" to produce, constrain the body's ability to move freely, and attract not always wanted attention from men (157). However, she turns her memories of her former masculinity—and her slightly outdated male wardrobe—to her advantage in a series of acts that have led scholars to embrace her queering of gender. Though the male Orlando never dons women's garb, the female Orlando frequently disguises herself as a man, cross-dressing in order to move about freely in society and to take female lovers. Changing from masculine to feminine attire as it suits her needs and desires, Orlando "enjoy[s] the love of both sexes equally"; as a result, "the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied" (221). As amusing and varied as are the results, Orlando's flexibility in gender and desire is motivated not by the search for an utopian space of gender and sexual fluidity but by the desire for a means of circumventing restrictions on the circulation of women's bodies. Her experience of Alexander Pope's misogyny initially spurs her to don men's clothes, and her defiance of a visiting "gentleman[']s" view that "Women have no desires" prompts the narrator to insist on Orlando's enjoyment of other women's company (219-220).

[34] Orlando's queerly gendered life history is most legible to other characters not on her body but within social institutions. Because of her departure from England as a man and resurfacing as a woman, Orlando becomes the subject of a series of lawsuits, arising from England's patriarchal laws, that allege:

(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. (168)

The feminist politics at work in Woolf's mockery of British law do not render her novel irrelevant to transgender studies. Rather, they highlight similarities between Orlando's legal situation and the difficulties still regularly encountered in the present day by

transsexuals, who are often subject to the whims of institutions whose reliance on binary conceptualizations of gender leave them poorly equipped to handle the complexities of transgendered peoples' lives. Far from liberating Orlando from the shackles of the body, then, Orlando's transformation from male to female places her in a state of ontological indeterminacy, subsisting between living and dead, royalty and commoner, man and woman. The novel's mockery of the absurdity of a legal system focused so intensely on differences between the sexes is a part of its larger strategy of unsettling teleological narratives of gender—and of inverting the narrative of “inversion” that hinges on those distinctions.

[35] Woolf's feminist critique of sexism informs the novel's treatment both of the restrictions that Orlando experiences upon transformation into a woman and of the homophobia that leaves h/er queer desires latent while a man. Yet instead of asserting that the novel's concern with institutional sexism precludes its having any relevance to trans studies, we might instead read Orlando's interrogation of desire, gender, and embodiment as productively aligned with contemporary feminist and transgender politics. To do so is to refuse “to perpetuate a minoritizing or ghettoizing use of ‘transgender’ to delimit and contain the relationship of ‘trans-’ conceptual operations to ‘-gender’ statuses and practices in a way that render[s] them the exclusive property of a tiny class of marginalized individuals” (Stryker, Currah, and Moore 11). As Stryker, Currah, and Moore argue, to “resist applications of ‘trans’ as a gender category that is necessarily distinct from more established categories such as ‘woman’ or ‘man’” helps to illuminate the way in which all forms of gender are subject to the mechanisms of disciplinary power (Stryker, Currah, and Moore 12). Orlando shows these mechanisms in action. The novel's value for transgender studies lies not in tracking the nature of the desire for bodily transition, but in pointing to the possibility of a “trans-feminist” politics that is attentive to the consequences that gender inequities have upon transgender experience. The novel's anti-identitarian strategy facilitates this project by thwarting claims that Orlando's situation can be accounted for by considering only a single axis of oppression. In so doing, Orlando pushes us to consider sexism, homophobia, and transphobia as distinct but interlocking problems.

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#### **Contributor's Note:**

**CHRIS COFFMAN** is Associate Professor of English and Coordinator of the Women's and Gender Studies Program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She is the author of Insane Passions: Lesbianism and Psychosis in Literature and Film (Wesleyan UP, 2006), which traces the now-discredited myth of the lesbian-as-madwoman from its introduction in early twentieth-century psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan) and literature (Breton, Barnes, H.D.) through to its startling reappearance in contemporary film. She has also published articles on Joyce's Ulysses and Kafka's The Trial.

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