



***Time is Out of Joint: Trans Identity Assemblage in the
Queer Temporality of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A
Biography****

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To Ἀθήνα, Ἑρμῆς and Ἀπόλλων

To all my trans siblings, brothers, and sisters

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* has already been established as a queer novel by several previous academic studies. Many of its aspects, such as the subversion of gender expectations, Woolf's theory of the androgynous mind, as well as how the character relates to time, have already been separately analysed. Nonetheless, almost all previous studies view Orlando's identity as a stable change signalling only one of his/her transformations. Recent analysis has pointed out to a different approach, interpreting Orlando's gender identity as a nonbinary trans character. Following this line of approach, I argue that what is central in *Orlando: A Biography*'s narrative is the unique relation between Orlando's nonbinary identity, time, and history throughout the text. I aim, then, to analyse Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* from a trans studies perspective to disentangle the core of the relationship between Orlando's gender identity and trans queer temporalities. To do so, firstly, I will focus on its classification of Woolf's text as a transgenre, in order to open a discussion between the Orlando the character, and *Orlando* the text. Moreover, I will examine the link between the narrative's structure and the character's identity connection to time. To do so, I will rely on the latest sociological studies on nonbinary gender identity by Sebastian Cordoba, based on a queer interpretation of assemblage theory, together with theories about trans queer temporalities and its relation to history and time by Jack Halberstam and Elisabeth Freeman.

Keywords: *Orlando: A Biography*, Virginia Woolf, queer temporalities, transgender, nonbinary, queer historiography, assemblage theory.

Resumen

Orlando de Virginia Woolf ha sido recientemente establecida como una obra dentro del área de los estudios *queer* por previos estudios académicos. Muchos de sus aspectos como la subversión de las expectativas de género, así como la teoría de la mente andrógina acuñada por Woolf han sido previamente analizadas por separado. Aun así, dichos estudios señalan la transición de Orlando como un viaje en un solo sentido, señalando sólo una de sus transformaciones. Sin embargo, otros estudios recientes han propuesto una hipótesis diferente, interpretando Orlando como un personaje trans no binarie. Siguiendo esta línea de análisis señalo que lo que es central en la narrative de la obra de Woolf es la intersección entre la identidad de género de le protagoniste, el tiempo y la historia a lo largo del texto. Así pues, en esta tesis analizaré desde el punto de vista del área de estudios trans la relación entre la identidad de género de Orlando y las temporalidades queer. Para acometer esta tarea primeramente dilucidaré la clasificación de Orlando como un *transgenre*. Fijando mi atención en los lazos entre la estructura narrativa de la obra y la identidad del personaje protagonista en conexión con nociones de temporalidad. Para ello emplearé las últimas teorías sociológicas sobre la formación de la identidad de género no binarie presentadas por Sebastian Cordoba y basadas en la teoría del ensamblaje. Unidas a teorías sobre las temporalidades queer y su relación con la historia por Jack Halberstam y Elisabeth Freeman.

Palabras clave: *Orlando: A Biography*, Virginia Woolf, temporalidades *queer*, transgénero, nobinarie, historiografía *queer*, teoría del ensamblaje.

0. Introduction

“Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact” (Woolf 1977:8)

Published in 1928, Woolf’s *Orlando: A Biography* is a literary work that I read for the first time during Preparatory School. During those years I studied in a medieval building that functioned as an arts and crafts school. I had adopted the habit of reading while walking under its arcades, on its long stairwells and secret passages that connected the several buildings that composed the old Massana School. Once I began to read *Orlando* I knew that this work was destined to change my perception of literature for the first time in my life. Up to that point I had navigated my readings—with the notable exception of *Twelfth’s Night* Viola—without fully identifying with any of the female or male characters, that is to say, some part of me already knew I did not identify with neither of their gender identities, only with some of their personality traits. There was something about the weight of centuries in the walls of that old building, the history of it permeating every act inside of it, that together with my desperation to be able to change, that made my experience of reading *Orlando* something truly liberating. In short, Orlando, as a text and as a character, seemed to talk to me in a way no other work had.

Timelines had always seemed to work against people like me. It was as if it was a cage in which our bodies were just subjected to unwanted changes—such as puberty—or sometimes as some sort of pre-scripted order of events in which we found ourselves not truly fitting in, barely shallowing the continuous discomfort of it. There was something about the conjunction of Orlando’s identity and time that spoke to my experience in a way no other piece of fiction had ever done before. It was 2009. I did not know there was a name for what I was. I did not even know it was possible to be someone who could exist without necessarily being a man or a woman. Someone who perhaps navigated between those two concepts or were none of them. A decade after, the debate around the rights of trans people to exist was consolidated as a *cultural war*.¹ It was a question of time that *Orlando* would be addressed, since it has been commented by few academics as well as trans individuals who saw themselves on the text.

¹ The term is not mine, used since 2016 by press reports to describe the ideological reaction against the inclusion of trans rights into law. See (Elliot 2016) and (Simons 2023).

Unfortunately, through the expansion of social media—and lack of media literacy—we are witnessing an increasing amount of anti-intellectualist positions which abuse *opinionism*² and rarely offer more than rhetorical fallacies to support their claims. Twitter, of course, is one of the most popular platforms to exhibit such behaviour, a platform that bases itself on polarising issues that otherwise could be discussed in a civilised, polite way. In fact, it was one of the multiple tweets on these matters which, made its way to my preferred social media platform (Tumblr) and gave me the idea to pursue this thesis.

It truly does not matter who wrote the tweet, what sparked my interest was the contents of it. In short, it stated that since *Orlando* is a work of fiction, this proves that any change of gender or sex appearance had to be fictional as well. Besides the rather obvious simplistic take, the fact that Woolf's work keeps coming into discussion while arguing about gender identity or trans people is notable enough to reflect upon.

Curiously enough, just some months ago the trans philosopher Paul B. Preciado presented a new adaptation of *Orlando* in the Berlin Film Festival of 2023 called *Orlando: ma biographie politique*, proving further the cultural importance of this work in the current cultural climate. During the movie's trailer, Paul B. Preciado states that "Orlando is the biography of all trans people". I find it quite telling that the most recent adaptation of *Orlando*—which was written in tandem with *Dysphoria Mundi* a meditation of queer temporalities in relation to society—delves into many of the subjects that this work aims to discuss.

Before we must continue, I must point out that *Orlando* is rarely a work discussed through modernist British literature's syllabus; it has been often considered a rarity even among Woolf's lavish narrative. Too odd, perhaps, to discuss among undergraduates; a brilliant work that was born from Woolf's mind almost imperatively in the span of a few months. It has been generally consigned to be analysed by few but talented feminist academics and, lately, a subject of the still new academic area of expertise of queer studies and the even newer trans studies. It is in the span of the roughly last decade when this work has been discussed by trans scholars as a work inside trans studies and pivotal to narratives of trans life writing as well as trans fiction in general.

²A popular term to describe the act of expressing an opinion that is yielded as an argument without being based on fact.

Furthermore, reading many theses analysing *Orlando* I realised that most of them had a perception of the work in the antipodes of how most queer people understand this work of fiction. The reception of it up until very recently had been interpreting it as mostly an allegory of the double or a mere meditation on British history, as well as the established mock biography or the anecdotal present to Vita Sackville-West. Despite these previous interpretations, most of the queer people who have read this thrilling book interpret it in a vastly different manner than those who have read it previously. It is in the affections and feelings that unite queer individuals—in particular, trans individuals—to read this work as a trans narrative what finally led me to explore it in the academic field.

Later, reading the interpretations of queer theorists, I finally found the direction in which I had interpreted this work, albeit completely intuitively at first. Woolf was a visionary; her works were able to introduce many of the themes postmodernity would further explore. It is not surprising, then, that her writing of *Orlando: A Biography* represented a revolutionary stand on, not only writing—and queer writing in particular—but also in the use of temporal dislocations correlated to gender identity. We find in *Orlando* all the elements of the creation, expression and representation of a trans non binary identity and we can find parallelisms with other life writings of the present that are openly trans.

After reading *Orlando* for the first time, I used it as inspiration for one of my works while I was studying arts and crafts. I made a work of sculptural collage assembling different materials. More than ten years after this first attempt to express what this puzzling writing inspired me—the attempted assemblage piece has been lost for a long time—I still have the need to try again to disentangle what the conjunction of *Orlando*'s identity and his unusual relationship to time inspired me then. At the time I would not have been able to fully articulate what reading that work had meant to me or what conclusions exactly had I extracted from my reading. I could, in an intuitive way, understand partly what it was saying, but I could not find the words to explain it.

Only now I find myself finding the right arguments to justify my interpretation parting from trans studies. I am of the opinion, as others have expressed in the past, that the personal is also political. There are precious ideas in those realities asphyxiated by an imposed 'norm'. It is in the space of what has been largely avoided in discussions up until recently where, perhaps, we can find novel ideas to progress intellectually and as a

society. Ignoring the importance of art in representing realities that existed, exist, and will exist; ignoring that art constantly interacts with the world is an ideological position that is too widely adopted these days. Literature is the heart of humanity's mirror. It is in literature where we see ourselves as we have always been. My intention is not only to prove, or attempt to confirm, *Orlando* as a central work in trans studies—establishing it as a reference for posterior trans texts—but also to demonstrate with the tools of cultural analysis that I would use, that another reading of *Orlando* is possible.

Maybe my thesis will not only achieve to highlight *Orlando*'s importance within trans studies, its affective relationship with queer individuals; but also, to show with the rhetorical tools that I have acquired over the years can shed new light on to recreate that experience of reading a sublime work such as this one for the first time in life.

0.1. Thesis Statement

In this thesis I attempt to answer several questions that the most recent reception of this work has led to discuss. Previous studies of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, from a queer studies and trans studies point of view, have justified the inclusion of this work as an example of queer life writing in the form of a mock biography. These theses have been solidly based on arguments that analyse certain aspects of the novel such as the performativity of gender, the main character's personal relationships or to Orlando's distorted biography—in relation to studies on gender identity. Hence, I participate in this discussion by adding my own hypothesis.

I choose to focus on various aspects of the novel such as the formation of gender identity understood as an assemblage, in which queer temporality holds a central place. Assemblage theory as applied to gender identity is a theory defended by various queer philosophers that I will cite in my study. Thus, since I have seen several elements that could confirm it, such as, for example, the alteration of lived time as a metaphor for queer temporalities. I do support that the creation of Orlando as a figure of an undying queer subverting the trope of 'bury your gays' has been key to the creation of other character with similar characteristics.

To disentangle the core of the relationship of Orlando's gender identity formation and time and history as presented on the text I will make an analysis of the work's aspects that are relevant to the matter by comparing relevant elements of various other thesis and works, to add to the discussion around it. In regards to methodology, I will

employ a cultural studies analysis based on relevant theories in relation with the topics discussed, about gender identity and queer temporalities.

Woolf's *Orlando* is, in comparison to other modernist texts, in its narrative inaugural of many genres—some attributed to *Orlando: A Biography* the beginning of queer life writing—and at the same time a work that challenges commonplaces in European literature. The way Woolf chooses to do so is by presenting us with the life exploits of a character that traverses time in a way that clashes constantly with the constraints of the society in which Woolf lived.

The narrative's cataloguing or ambiguous genre is a subject that will also be explored in this thesis as I think it is the key to understanding why there is a direct relationship between the text's structure and the protagonist. At the same time, I contend that there is another correlation between the character's gender identity and queer altered time and history. To understand why the form of the narration is influenced by the subject it portrays and how that affects its reading as an important piece of queer writing I will use assemblage theory as applied to identity formation and expression in relation to theories around queer temporalities and how these find their representation in art and culture. It is in the exploration and disentanglement of these elements, separately investigated though related to one another, the way I think I would be able to answer the question this thesis proposes, which are the following:

What is the relationship between Orlando's gender identity and the body of the text? Apropos to the creation of the text, to inspect on the influence of Woolf's theories of the androgynous mind over the creation of Orlando, and how these theories resonate with modern notions of gender identity formation.

Going back to the text's structure, I think it is important to elucidate why the narration chooses to start when it does and what relation it has with the character's gender identity. In addition, I aim to locate the reason why Orlando transverses history and time, what links it might have to the character's identity. This would serve to inspect upon the notions of difference and alterity Woolf's work aims to problematise.

Thus, from the connection of the narrative's form and the subject of it, to the identity of the character with time I aim to create a circular argument. I aim to demonstrate the utility of assemblage theory and queer temporality to unravel what lies at the centre of the narrative. Finally, it is my intention to demonstrate how this particular reading based on affective theories from a poststructuralist point of view is

productive to the current discussion of the relevance of *Orlando: A Biography* as a central work in trans studies.

0.2. Methodology and Corpus

In order to prove my thesis, I will base my analysis mainly on the central corpus: *Orlando: A Biography* and a volume of Virginia Woolf's diaries—relevant passages of her diaries in relation to *Orlando*—as well as *A Room of One's Own* which encompasses many of the ideas that populated Woolf's mind while producing *Orlando*, as primary sources. Virginia Woolf's diaries would be interpreted especially regarding her readings to justify intertextual links between her literary ideas and production. I do not intend to base my analysis uniquely on the author's psychology or biography, since that aspect has also been sufficiently cross-examined. Nor would I centre my analysis on the personal relationship between Woolf and Vita Sackville-West since it has already been subject of several studies before, thus, exhausted its productive discussion.

Several previous works have argued in favour of establishing *Orlando* as a main work inside queer studies, as well as trans studies, as for instance Wingenroth (2019), whose work also first establishes *Orlando* as a queer life writing and as a non-dying queer individual (Wingenroth 2019:1). Followingly, a series of new works on which I support my thesis and from which I depart to add to the discussion would be mentioned. Specifically, Souza's thesis (2017) as well as Hastings's (2008), which already acknowledges that the key to Woolf's work is *Orlando*'s gender identity and places postmodern interpretations of the genre at the centre of the reading. Ländström (2016) goes further proposing *Orlando* as a nonbinary trans individual—theory which this thesis supports—as well as linking his queer identity to queer desires and emotionalities.

As expressed before, I will attempt to add to the current discussion answering several questions proposed in the thesis statement. To continue, for instance, Palacín (2018) indicates the relevance of the androgynous mind within Woolf's production. Palacín (2018) pinpoints the androgynous mind in relation to the conception of *Orlando* a fact that would also be mentioned in this work.

Followingly, Gallagher's thesis (2008) draws from the Shakespearean influences on Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, which will be shortly mentioned in my work, to theorise

intertextual links that prompted Woolf to put Orlando's gender presentation in dialogue with history and other queer writers, arguments that I think are worth commenting on.

Additionally, Caughie (2013) is the first one that conceptualized *Orlando's* narrative structure in relation to gender identity. Moreover, Beers (2020) follows Caughie's thesis expanding the importance of queer alterations of time. Most importantly, I depart from the hypotheses of M.D. Beers (2020), since it is the first incursion to trans theory in an overt manner, in relation to queer temporalities.

The second section of secondary sources will consist of those used as tools of analysis in my thesis. Primarily, I will base my approach to Orlando's identity following the thesis of Professor Sebastian Cordoba (2020) which employs the poststructuralist theory of assemblage adapted to explain the formation of gender identity. Secondly, I will use several anti-essentialist and affect theories such as queer temporalities by Jack Halberstam (2005) and Freeman (2010) that will act as a framework to provide solid arguments to previous attempts to situate *Orlando* as a work within the trans queer tradition. Although some of these elements have been analysed, such as queer temporality and trans identity, most of them have been treated as unconnected to each other. I do think there is much to inquire about the active interactions between these different axes related to the narrative since, from my perspective, they have the potential to become productive discussions.

In brief, I will refer to previous studies to examine the state of the question and add to the discussion with my own statements complementing those already explored and giving an answer to the proposed questions. To do so, I will employ theoretical tools of analysis based on poststructuralist analysis and queer theories related to assemblage theory; besides of the related field of affectivities together with queer temporalities and queer historiography.

1. Brief summary of Orlando's reception: Towards a Transgenre Interpretation.

Initially, *Orlando* was viewed as a rarity, a mock biography that played with fantasy while trying to use a serious tone. For instance, German and Kaehele (1962) make a comment on the historical themes of the novel but do not link those to Orlando's identity. There have been others such as Burns (1994) that point out the use of sarcastic tones to criticise social practices as well as Woolf's criticism of genres, such as the biographic or historical. Admittedly, Orlando does criticise social practices but in many

cases they are related to gender binary presentation. It interrogates endlessly about the imposition of certain practices among men and women.

Others, such as Dolezel (1985:464), have focused their approach on Orlando's fantastic tones, arguing in favour of reading Orlando as an example of the literary theme of the double, ignoring the many parts of the novel in which it is stated that Orlando, despite their changes, is a single entity. It is true that this reading of Orlando as a double in conjunction with time, at least evidences the importance of Orlando's layered existence as well as the complexities of his/her vacillations throughout time. Nonetheless, Woolf's narration states the unifying aspects of Orlando's mind, a subject that I will address later in this thesis.

It is quite striking that so many scholars have come up with the most varied and curious explanations instead of simply accepting that it is quite possible that a queer person like Virginia Woolf trying to, implicitly or explicitly, might have been writing a queer text. In addition, there has also been sufficient analysis of the role of Orlando as an artist or as an allegory of history of literature, therefore, it will only be tangentially mentioned in this work.

Subsequently, during the second wave of feminism, notably with its inclusion within cultural studies, Orlando's reception shifted to focus on the biographic ties between Virginia Woolf's relationship with Vita Sackville-West and *Orlando: A Biography*. Of course, this matter is still the focus of many theses such as De Gay's (2007), based in *Orlando: A Biography's* impact on feminism or García-Madrid's (2021) which create parallelisms with women's oppression during the Victorian period.

It is true that these readings have been productive and have procured many interesting additions to the general comprehension of Woolf's work. It is worth mentioning that the previous hegemonic reading, related to the second wave of feminism in academia, triumphed over others before the one we explore in this thesis due to its capacity of diffusion and credibility within cultural studies—as well as the solid argumentation of those who presented it. Of course, the second-wave feminist reading is far more interesting than the ones that precede it—scarce as they were—which rely more on other kinds of conjectures. Primarily, second-wave and third-wave feminist readings of Orlando focus on the link between the concepts such as the angel of the house to Woolf's favourable depiction of feminine subversions. Most importantly, it has not been until the last decade, and with the inclusion of queer studies within cultural

studies, that there has been a proliferation of thesis favourable to approach Orlando from a queer perspective. This new approach has been at the root of discussions of how Woolf's work challenges canons and epistemologies.

I think it is important to mention that the undeniable lack of a collective within academia can influence the typology of texts' analysis. When those who would be more likely to identify certain aspects present on a texts' body are not present between those who analyse the texts; we might find gaps in research. It is vital to remark that I defend that the timing of the current line of analysis of Orlando (those that interpret Orlando as both queer writing and a queer character) are not based merely on cultural trends, or made by happenstance, but answer to specific material reality—which is the inclusion of diversity within academia, as well as the arrival of trans studies to the area of cultural studies. To put it succinctly, the methods by which a thesis is elaborated might be subjected to the latest trends in cultural analysis, but the central subject of it would be clearly informed by the inclusion of queer academics willing to articulate the intelligible reading of a work by proposing their distinct reception.

One of the aspects that I want to emphasise with this section is the undeniable political component of reading a text such as *Orlando* by academics who are familiar with queer theory—or even, perhaps, queer themselves. As a matter of fact, Beers resumes the importance of this aspect:

Viewing Orlando as a multilayered trans text – generically, temporally, and through the use of a trans character – allows for the expansion of recognized embodiment, not only in bringing attention to the vacillation of gender expression found in and before Woolf's time, but through bringing new knowledge of gender and trans theory to old expressions of gender fluidity. As trans theorists and authors push for recognition and acceptance of their various, non-normative expressions of gender and temporality, I believe in the importance of using works from the past to highlight the previous existence of such embodiments. By doing so, one builds a historical record of non-normative individuals – a history that often remains hidden or glossed over in the case of queer individuals. (Beers 2020:29-30)

Orlando is, indeed, written by a queer individual, addressed to another queer individual. It is, then, not only possible to trace the cultural record of queer individuals but also trace the silenced history of the queerness of those who wrote the texts. To read and acknowledge the recognition of the 'other' is also to transform reality through literature. We encounter a complex trans text which plays with the character as both a tool to signify rupture against binarism in society as well as to criticise previous conceptions of binary and linear literature written from a cisgender, heterosexual point of view.

[...]is a fictional literary biography that archives the lived experiences of a queer, non-dying person, a novel that would understandably complicate fact, fiction, truth, life writing, theory, and empiricism within academia. However, queer theory has often been inattentive to queer life writing such as *Orlando: A Biography*, though the materiality of queerness is ubiquitous in the text. (Wingenroth 2019:1)

Admittedly, as Wingenroth defends, *Orlando* is a solid example of queer life writing. Nonetheless, I aim to add complexity to the discussion around *Orlando: A Biography* categorising it as more than just an example of queer life writing. In various aspects, *Orlando* is made of an assemblage of genres; we may find between its pages from poetic references to scraps of history or even philosophic commentary. The text blurs frontiers of genres by its external form, yes, but also by the ever-shifting essence of its protagonist. Therefore, it is not farfetched to find ties between the form of the text and the protagonist; an interpretation that those within trans studies have proposed.

In my view, Virginia Woolf, even if only in an intuitive way, challenges the conceptions of narrative, so as the body of the narrative can follow the body of the protagonist as he/she vacillates, encounters the world “to disrupt our notions of the real and our investments in authenticity” (Caughie 2013:519-20). *Orlando* was created and is, in essence, an experimental text, a “balance between truth & fantasy” that “must be careful” (Woolf 1982:162).

One of the main issues of reception has been categorising *Orlando: A Biography* inside of a single genre. The first receptions seem to rely on the fantastic elements of the novel to characterise it as belonging to the fantastic genre. The second type of reception relied on the analysis of the author’s life to justify it as a biographic present from one writer to another, whereas others have simply categorised it as a novel. Nonetheless, that is precisely why it is difficult to relegate *Orlando* to one or another genre.

During its writing Virginia Woolf calls *Orlando* “a writer’s holiday” (Woolf 1982:177) and never describes *Orlando* as a novel in her diaries, nor does she admit it is a plain biography. In fact, there is even discussion of how to shelf the book after its publication since no one, not even Woolf, had a clear answer to the issue (Woolf 1982:198). The only thing she purposely planned was the tone in which she was going to write it. A tone that would be “half laughing, half serious” (Woolf 1982:168). Consequently, to find a name seemingly a new category of texts, Caughie coins the term “transgenre”:

Recently the French, for whom the word "genre" (gender) refers not to sexuality but to linguistics, have begun to use "transgenre" to translate the English "transgender." "Transgenre," then, when used in French, foregrounds linguistic

differences and distinctions in works about gender. I adopt the French "transgenre" in English for narratives treating transgender lives that transfigure conventions of narrative diegesis. Transsexual [...] writing,[...] disrupts conventions of narrative logic by defying pronominal stability, temporal continuity, and natural progression. It thereby demands a new genre, a transnarrative. Woolf reached this insight in writing *Orlando*, remarking in her diary that she doubted she would write another novel after *Orlando*, that she would need another name for her fiction (Diary 3, 176). Transnarratives cross genres—for example, medical, psychological, judicial, journalistic, anthropological, philosophical, autobiographical, fictional—as in the case of *Orlando* with its generic mix of biography and fantasy, philosophy and literary history, poetry and prose. They cross—or more accurately, crisscross—temporal moments as the protagonist transitions in gender and in time. Of necessity, transnarratives emphasize the artifice of gender, even while maintaining its naturalness. (Caughie 2013:502-3)

Since the temporary alterations and *Orlando*'s identity are clearly at the essence of the narrative, it is quite difficult to avoid reading the text in these terms. Something which, however, has been done since the beginning. It is difficult to extract from a straight cisgender point of view conclusions to understand why this writing talks about trans narratives. Indeed, it does so in a subtle manner, but its subtleties are laid plainly for those familiarised with them to identify with. Above all, because *Orlando* does not depict a clear linear trans narrative—which sometimes attempts to imitate straight temporality—we encounter an even more complex conception of gender; thus, a further complicated connection to expectations of temporalities.

Conventions of narrative must bend towards a mixture of genres to accommodate the existence of a character of which his very existence is, in itself, breaking the linearity of the genre of biography and the verisimilitude of the individual in history. *Orlando* is not a character of one gender in one time, it is a character of genders in several times; he/she contains several genres/genders as he/she³ transverses time and history. Since this linearity in narration is disrupted by the sole focus of the narration (*Orlando*) a new word (transgenre) to categorize the work is more than justified.

We may ask ourselves that if reading *Orlando* as a multilayered text—half queer biography, half fictional, half novel and so on—has proved to be the most productive reading or reception then why has it taken up until quite recently for this discussion to be opened at all. *Orlando*'s interpretation as a transgenre text and as a trans writing has always been there, albeit disregarded. It is a reception of the narrative that has always

³ From now on I will address *Orlando* with the two pronouns that are used throughout the text; changing the order of them to mimic the character's preference to address themselves, when necessary, as the narration progresses.

lingered through the text. Finally, with these last theories we can open a new productive discussion based on this complex multilayered reading in which the binary understanding of the work has been finally lifted. After all, using Woolf's metaphor "[...] the obscurity, which divides the sexes and let's linger innumerable impurities in its gloom, was removed, and if there is anything in what the poet says about truth and beauty, this affection gained in beauty what it lost in falsity". (Woolf 2016:114) Woolf notes, when what divides "the sexes" is removed, these white and black interpretation of identity, only then new opportunities to interpret this work arise.

As a transgenre, *Orlando* explores the relationship of the genre of autobiography with history and of history with societal conceptions of normative temporalities. "[...] *Orlando* serves as the prototype of the transgenre, one that reconfigures in life writing narratives not only notions of gender but also of time, identity, history, and the very nature of writing and reading" (Caughie 2013:502). Here Caughie summarises effectively what lies at the core of the trans reading of *Orlando*. It is a piece of writing that transverses different types of genres with a character that effectively transitions continuously between genders and has a unique relation with time, as it would be explored in the next part of this thesis.

By creating this type of character, the narrative around him/her bends and changes. By force, a new trans narrative must be created to accommodate a character who cannot have a linear relation with any theme that the narrative touches upon. *Orlando's* mere queer existence effectively queers the narrative. It is interesting that *Orlando* goes back and forth and does not disabuse her/his time as one gender or the other but acknowledges both. The only constant is change, non-linearity. This constant "negotiation" is often found in queer individuals; not only in their live experiences but also their relation to other contextual elements such as language, environment or even the subject of the text:

Queer subjects are not only performatively reworking themselves, but also simultaneously reformulating the property, attribute, qualities, or actions that surround them, for the essence of the performative—in the Austinian, Derridean, or Butlerian senses—is the interplay between text and context, subject and environment, language and meaning. This interplay, grounded in language but also time, is what is at stake in the critical reframing of queer representations. (McCallum and Tuhkanen 2011: 12)

Moreover, Virginia Woolf never intended *Orlando* to be a narrative read as solely as a biography. The biographic genre was a type of writing practiced solely by normative

men, following a strict expectation of linearity. Woolf profoundly subverts these expectations by mingling fiction with fact. Everything is ambiguous, it is the product of the in-between of the divide between genres, the in-between of genders and the in-between of what is established since “by embodying a queer identity through experiencing a gender transition and having an ambiguous sexuality, Orlando’s character also queers the narrative”. (Wingenroth 2019:34)

To “queer” the narrative Woolf adds complexity to every genre she comes across through the astute commentary, mocking every institution that comes across the text. Woolf makes a short essay of every topic discussed throughout Orlando; everything that comes into her pursuit is carefully dismantled.

The tale of Orlando is one that complicates convention in the most generalized and all-consuming way. Gender roles and performativity, love, marriage, creative art, time, history, and even the very structure and genre of the novel itself all reveal the deconstructive tradition of the text. Through an atmosphere of parody and satire, *Orlando: A Biography* deliberately pokes holes and makes cracks in all that it narrates, playing with assumptions and literary traditions. (Wingenroth 2019:18)

Presenting postmodernist notions of deconstruction, non-essentialism and fluidity through genres, Woolf herself realised she had produced a piece of writing that was like nothing that had been written before. Woolf escapes censure by combining genres as the protagonist of her writing escapes binary definitions or the linear progress that a ‘proper’ biography demands.

In her brilliant intuitions while writing Orlando, Virginia Woolf created an intricate tapestry in which time and identity became the core of her *Orlando: A Biography*. To understand the intricacies of Orlando read as a transgenre, first we need to address the possible ideas that populated Woolf’s mind while creating Orlando. In which, of course, we would have to decide whether Woolf’s notions of gender identity could be explored from the perspective of current gender identity formation and how it interacts with the centre of our analysis: gender identity in relation to temporality in life of a trans subject.

2. Orlando and Gender Identity

2.1. The androgynous mind in Virginia Woolf's writing

While writing *Orlando* Virginia Woolf was testing a series of novel ideas that would appear later, on her essay *A Room of One's Own*. These ideas would be reflected in *Orlando*, a work in which she recognized that her intuitions were twinned with this theoretical framework, “shov[ing] everything aside to come into existence” (Woolf 1982:168). The essay was published in 1929 but its ideas were conceived a year before, as many critics coincide, it was probably being written at the same time as *Orlando*. It was brought upon by several lectures and further investigation into women's writing but Woolf used it also as an opportunity to present various of her own takes into writing and literature in general.

One of the central topics of *A Room of One's Own* is a rather vehement criticism of the strict binary divide between sexes which begins with—as many Woolf's works—with a meditation on a seemingly banal scene:

But the sight of the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave me made me also ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness? (Woolf 1977:106)

In this fragment, Woolf uses the binary language that she had at her disposal at the time. Nonetheless, to suggest that there are “two sexes in the mind” and “two sexes in the body” could be seen as an absolutely laughable concept at best to the vast majority of the population at the time. Woolf, then, continues:

Perhaps the androgynous mind is less apt to make these distinctions than the single-sexed mind. He meant, perhaps, that the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided. (Woolf 1977:106)

The androgynous mind as described by Woolf is not bothered by binary divisions; it is “undivided”. This “resonant” and “porous” mind is made to absorb influences from the world in order to create a round, complete work. Woolf, then, continues identifying a series of writers that to her own intuition are “[...] the type of the androgynous, of the man-womanly” (Woolf 1977:107), in this case Shakespeare. Woolf states that “[...]one must turn back to Shakespeare then, for Shakespeare was androgynous [...]; (Woolf 1977:112). The comment on Shakespeare as an example of a writer that has been able to write characters with an androgynous mind is an interesting one since *Orlando's* action

begins during the Elizabethan era and presents inspirations of various Shakespeare's works—which is a fact that has often been overlooked and we will later focus on the next sections.

What is remarkable here is that the mere fact that Woolf proposes a way of creating not influenced by binary conceptions of life in one of her most important essays marks her greatness, not only as a modernist writer and thinker but as a predecessor of many anti-essentialist stances that later would be adopted by postmodernist writers to comment on subjects such as identity.

Then, Woolf goes on to mockingly examine the gender expectations which seem to make men and women act differently from each other, a sarcastic tone that we find in *Orlando* as well. Woolf focuses on the differences between the Elizabethan period and Victorianism stating that she misses “the power of suggestion” of Elizabethan writing (Woolf 1977:109), which is a concept that we will later encounter throughout *Orlando*'s writing.

Woolf might have been more inclined to defend a writing that was distinctly ‘feminine’ in previous years, as her essay *Women Novelists* (1918) suggests; however, towards the year of the writing of *Orlando*, Woolf seems clearly inclined to portray a rather negative view on inclining oneself to one or the other extreme of a binary way of writing:

It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman. And fatal is no figure of speech; for anything written with that conscious bias is doomed to death. It ceases to be fertilized. Brilliant and effective, powerful and masterly, as it may appear for a day or two, it must wither at nightfall; it cannot grow in the minds of others. Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated. (Woolf 1977:112)

This interesting (and often overlooked fragment) in which Woolf declares ‘fatal’ to be “woman pure and simple” exposes matters that we need to keep in mind as these were the ideas that populated Woolf's mind before writing *Orlando*.

Besides the material differences between men and women that would make one writing to favour one style or other depending on societal expectations, Woolf hinted as well that time might be a factor in one's artistic creation, which consists on spatial and temporal factors: “One could not but play for a moment with the thought of what might have happened if Charlotte Bronte had possessed say three hundred a years [...] had

somehow possessed more knowledge of the busy world, and towns and regions full of life; more practical experience, and intercourse with her kind and acquaintance with a variety of character” (Woolf 1977:76). It is interesting that Woolf mentions as another dimension of creation human limitations of time, since it would become a prominent theme in *Orlando*, a tale about an undying individual whose writing extends through the centuries.

Furthermore, it seems that for Woolf, an androgynous mind was more productive than someone who by her own definition possessed a mind solely aligned with the concept of woman or man. The notion of androgynous mind as influencing the subsequent Woolf’s creation had been dismissed as important by the first academics who comment on the subject: “The concept of true androgyny full balance and command of emotional range that includes male and female elements is attractive, although I suspect that like all utopian ideals of androgyny lacks zest and energy” (Showalter 1982:263). It is striking that this supposed “utopian ideal” lacking “zest and energy” has been used by Woolf as a freeing concept that would make one be able to overcome the binary confines of the styles of writing thus be open to new ideas which would flow directly from humanity’s well of experience.

Nonetheless, the opinion of the first academics who commented on the concept of androgyny was bleak to say the least: “Androgyny was the myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition” (Showalter 1982:264). We may rephrase this conclusion arguing that androgyny, as a theory, helped Woolf to create one of the most interesting, experimental writings of the twentieth century.

Since Woolf’s proposal of androgyny is a state in which there are both a mixture of male and female characteristics, it is interesting to notice that any bodily change and gender disorientation or affectivity is addressed by Woolf by metaphorical engines and fantastic alterations—again to evade the censor’s rule—but addressed as points in which *Orlando*’s identity emerges, fluctuates and takes a front seat again in the narration:

But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, thought it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same. His memory—but in the future we must, for convention’s sake, say ‘her’ for ‘his’, and ‘she’ for ‘he’—her memory then, went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacle. (Woolf 2016:96)

Woolf clearly states that Orlando's identity has remained the same, despite the physical changes. Most importantly, her/his mind is stated to be the same it was at first. What it is not stated is that Orlando was a man before, therefore a man now despite the apparent change of her gender characteristics.

[...]The divorcing of gender's assumed reliance upon sex is significant because many of society's presumed conventions are based off of assigned gender roles determined by sex. The deterioration of these pre-conceived notions allows for more flexibility within the gender roles and also makes space for the acceptance of the androgynous person, the type of character being presented to us in both "Friendships Gallery" and Orlando. (Hastings 2008:36)

Woolf, then, finds a way to remark Orlando's body androgyny by alternating apparent exterior mixture of characteristics and at the same time remarking that this external androgyny finds an equivalent inside Orlando's mind. He/she had then, an androgynous mind. Besides, Woolf's ideas of an androgynous mind seem to expand including other aspects of androgyny that interact with sex characteristics, such as gender roles and social relationships between genders:

For it was the mixture in her of man and woman, one being uppermost and then the other, that often gave her conduct an unexpected turn. The curious of her own sex would argue, for example if Orlando was a woman, how did she never take more than ten minutes to dress? [...]And then they would say, still, she has none of the formality of a man, or man's love for power. She is excessively tender-hearted. She could not endure to see a donkey beaten or a kitten drowned. Yet again, they noted, she detested household matters, was up at dawn and out among the fields in summer before the sun had risen. No farmer knew more about the crops than she did. She rode well and drove six horses at a gallop over London Bridge. Yet again, though bold and active as a man, it was remarked that the sight of another in danger brought the most womanly palpitations. She would burst into tears on slight provocation. She was unversed in geography, found mathematics intolerable, and held some caprices which are more common among women than men, as for instance that to travel south is to travel downhill. Whether, then, Orlando was most man or woman, it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided. (Woolf, 2016:133-34)

Woolf comments on gender presentation (clothes) on gender performance and customs. There is a profound meditation on how androgyny can be achieved even inhabiting a body to which society assigns a sex equivalent to a gender: All that determines gender in the enculturation⁴ we are subjected to. Woolf notices that this binary enculturation permeates all, from feelings (or affections) to social attitudes towards equals.

⁴ Used in its anthropologic and sociologic definition as a process to bind a group of humans to a set of practices, norms to preserve a type of socialization, in this case referring to gender roles and stereotypes.

Remarkably, Woolf promptly writes Orlando as a proof of an androgynous character capable of producing an androgynous work since Orlando as a character, decides earlier on that to pursue his/her and during the novel Orlando writes a long poem called *the Oak*:

Since Orlando experiences both masculinity and femininity throughout the novel, as he undergoes a sex change, it is common that these two forces inside him intermix, thus reaching androgyny. [...] Furthermore, there are times when Orlando totally detaches himself from gender impositions and uses his experiences both as a man and as a woman to write. (De Souza 2017:36)

As De Souza notices, Orlando seems to put into practice Woolf's theory of the androgynous mind when "these two forces inside [...] intermix" which makes his/her writing more varied and profound. Many of Orlando's creative efforts seem to be both influenced by the time he/she inhabits and the gender he/she is presenting with at the time:

She had carried this about with her for so many years now, and in such hazardous circumstances, that many of the pages were stained, some were torn. [...] She turned back to the first page and read the date, 1586, written in her own boyish hand. She had been working at it for close to three hundred years now. It was time to make an end. (Woolf 2016:166-7)

Therefore, Orlando seems a continuation of the exploration of the androgynous mind's theory through a character and writing that precisely aims to reach the state of mixing in perfection apparent two irreconcilable binary concepts to reach the representation of an androgynous mind. What is more, Orlando is a character that proves the existence of an androgynous mind in an androgynous body and at the same time as a writer themselves becomes an example of a writer with an androgynous mind. Thus, Woolf gifts us some sort of *mise en abyme* that effectively imagines her theory put to practice through fiction.

There are, certainly, some lines of Orlando that are quite similar to the fragments of *A Room of One's Own* in which Woolf pitied both the 'male' mind or a creation purely made with a female perspective:

And here it would seem from some ambiguity in her terms that she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither; and indeed, for the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each. It was a most bewildering and whirling state of mind to be in. The comforts of ignorance seemed utterly denied her. [...] Thus it is no great wonder, as she pitted one sex against the other, and found each alternately full of the most deplorable infirmities, and was not sure to which she belonged — [...] (Woolf 2016:112)

Orlando's rejection of either option—fully committing to identify as a man or as a woman—could have not been more clearly articulated. While Orlando is still at sea—a liminal space in which her/his gender disorientation can be fully explored—Orlando “was not sure to which she belonged”. From a binary and cisgender point of view there are expectations to which Orlando simply cannot feel an adherence to. Orlando perceives any of the two binaries as “full of the most deplorable infirmities”.

Therefore, there is evidence of the connection between Woolf's theories of the androgynous mind and the form that Orlando takes in the narration, externally and internally as a character. What is more, there is a direct correlation between Orlando's efforts as a writer and his/her identity. Virginia Woolf explores what could happen if a character that was purely androgynous could write from an androgynous point of view.

It is important, then, that we examine how this can be used in conversation with the narration's structure as a transgenre as well as new visions of gender identity and how that could affect the production of a queer narrative. In summary, Orlando successfully represents an example of Woolf's androgynous mind theory, both in external and internal characterisation. Orlando's writing was a creative view of the character to act as an expansion of the androgynous mind theory.

2.2. Identity in Trans Studies: Orlando as an assemblage

As we have already mentioned, Woolf wrote Orlando in an intuitive, fluid way. Normally, and even more between *Orlando: A Biography* and *The Waves*, stream of consciousness was both used to produce the structure and to present the character's internal point of view. Taking this fact into account, I found it interesting to employ the theory of affects, as well as assemblage theory, to further justify reading Orlando as a transgenre—since what brought Orlando into fruition was a cumulus of affective forces, impressions and ideas that culminated in an elaborate innovative text. As we know, cultural studies also have an emotional turn and the study of affects⁵ in the formation of sociological phenomena have become central in the last two decades. The cultural construction of elements such as gender identity that touch also emotions in conjunction

⁵ Theory first attributed to psychologist Silvan Tomkins, it organises affects and emotions focusing on embodied experience, a relation to several levels of interaction. In this work we mainly focus on Ahmed's way of conceiving affect theory regarding cultural objects.

with other interlaced elements such as time, relationships, or social customs, are essential to analyse complex cultural elements.

Furthermore, although Woolf's theory of the androgynous mind in relation to the contents of *Orlando* has been previously addressed by other academics, there is still a gap to fill in relation to the newest sociological studies that explore the current theories surrounding this subject. Recently, academics such as Sebastian Cordoba (2020) have explored gender identity formation from this affective poststructuralist point of view. In his thesis *Exploring Non-binary Genders: Language and Identity* Cordoba presents a series of narratives, as well as linguistic tools that would be instrumental to analyse gender identity formation in *Orlando: A Biography*.

Thus, in this section, I will prove that our modern approach to the formation of gender identity –as well as its expression—is not only not incompatible with Woolf's theory of the androgynous mind but we can find many elements in Woolf's theory that can be precursors of those that we use today in modern assemblage theory, as applied to gender identity.

Cordoba bases his sociological idea of identity formation on Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory. The use of Deleuze in queer theory⁶ is well reported, in this case Cordoba (2020) adapts part of assemblage theory of becoming to the capability of affects to participate in the composition of an identity:

Processes of becoming, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) are made up of a multitude of affects, referring to the capacity to affect – and be affected by – material and non-material forces. As such, affects such as human bodies, society, language, history, the material, and the abstract are all interlinked in non-hierarchical (rhizomatic) ways, as they affect one another constantly. (Cordoba 2020:82)

Thus, by this reasoning these processes of becoming within assemblage theory are a perfect tool to interrogate all the interactions that conform gender identity; since gender identity is composed of a mixture of material bodies such as society's perceptions, cultural constructs in addition to interactions with other bodies as well as the immaterial.

There are constant processes of interaction on multiple different levels, a complexity which is difficult to find a representation of in western literary tradition of

⁶ It is well known that queer theory has a critical genealogy to poststructuralist thinking, as the use of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Derrida as O'Rourke (2005) proves. With even collective books such as Deleuze and Queer Theory (2009) to note this fact.

antinomic binary conceptions of identity. This splitting perception makes a challenging endeavour to even try to write stepping out of these absolutely fixed epistemologies.

Nonetheless, Woolf, being the visionary she was, writes fragments in which eviscerates any binary conception of identity such as the following: “[...] these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter’s hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own, call them what you will [...]” (Woolf 2016:220). Although it is probably a purely fortuitous metaphor, it is interesting that Virginia Woolf uses the image of a plates piled on a waiter’s hand to describe certain aspects that conform identity; this fragment is amazingly close to what constitutes a *plateau*⁷ in Deleuze’s writing. What is even more striking is the use of almost the same metaphor—a plate here being used similarly as a trail to pile servings—to refer to the creation of this state of being which is multiple and has “different sympathies” or affects. There is, though, some essence behind the multiplicity of selves that create a ‘becoming’; to the same fragment De Souza comments that “the construction of Orlando is not based upon his personality; instead, it is based upon his essence”. There is some flexibility in his self, which is maintained throughout the years, “[...]these multiples expressions contribute for the constitution of one’s identity”. (De Souza 2017:37-8).

Cordoba also recognises that in order to analyse gender identity’s formation we must acknowledge sex and gender as “both constructs as multidimensional and bimodal rather than linear and binary” (Cordoba 2020:27). Cordoba’s approach is neither essentialist nor purely constructionist, advocating for disentangling what can be found in a gender identity assemblage: namely semblances of essence—a sense of knowing oneself as not a man or a woman—as well as cultural constructs. Followingly, this led us to define how assemblage theory has been adapted by Cordoba to create a theory on the expression of nonbinary trans identities:

I draw upon the concept of becomings as a useful metaphor for the experiences of change, transformation, and constant processes of emergence of gender. [...] This is by no means done in an organised fashion; it is messy and complex, [...] understands gender and identity to be always relational, always in a process of becoming (a constant journey with no final destination) –territorialised, deterritorialised and reterritorialised through affective flows that move through the body, society, language, and other material and abstract elements.[...] Thus, rather than merely an outcome of the performativity of social practice and social

⁷ A *plateau* is an assemblage that organises intensive processes into temporary stable states that can be given specific dates but can neither persist nor be repeated.

construction, gender is an assemblage formed on an ongoing basis through these affective flows. (Cordoba 2020:85)

In Cordoba's analysis neither gender or sex are treated as immovable objects but can circulate, change, be altered. Perhaps this view is more amicable to nonbinary identities since as Monro argues "the current binary systems of gender categorization fail to address the fluid and developmental nature of identity" (Monro 2003:442). Once again, a 'pluralist' perspective of gender is favoured since there are several levels to the conception of it. A compound of discourses that we see addressed in Orlando; the body is commented on (the material) and the cultural or what would be socially constructed as well as the performative elements of gender. Then, as it is described throughout Woolf's novel, Orlando does not compromise nor ceases pursuing in the creation of his/her identity in accordance with the postmodern notion of gender as a "constant journey with no final destination".

Therefore, looking at Orlando's identity from this theoretical standpoint, the vacillations continuously mentioned throughout the novel, the constant process of falling into trances and changing, all these elements seem to align with the conception of a nonbinary character that is in a constant process of becoming. The pluralist perspective on gender as an assemblage of many different elements are absolutely in line with the descriptions of Orlando's internal monologue regarding her/his gender identity.

If "the term cis (the abbreviated form of cisgender) literally means 'on the same side'" (Córdoba 2020:32) then we can conclude that Orlando was never in the men's side nor completely in the woman's side. Orlando goes against binarism since the beginning of the text, feeling constantly othered amidst other individuals who do not understand his/her gender vacillations or fluctuations; only getting a firm connection with those (as Shel) who are hinted to possess the same androgynous soul. The meditations on identity become even stronger at the end of the narration when Orlando interrogates herself/himself:

So Orlando, at the turn by the barn, called 'Orlando'? with a note of interrogation in her voice and waited. Orlando did not come.

'All right then', Orlando said, with the good humour people practise on occasion; and tried another. For she 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 many now have called [...] the boy who sat on the hill; the boy who saw the poet [...] the young man who fell in love with Sasha; or upon the

Courtier [...] or she may have wanted the woman to come to her [...]the fine Lady
(Woolf 2016:220)

This fragment describes perfectly well multiplicity in the self, this description both functions, intensities and emotions are a description that fit perfectly well the definition of a nonbinary identity as an assemblage. Orlando sees the different layers of herself/himself, created throughout time; she/he is at the same time “the boy who saw the poet” and “the fine Lady”. Moreover, this process in which Orlando recognises that he had multiple selves absolutely agree with the concepts of territorialisation and deterritorialisation. At the same time, following Cordoba’s theory almost to detail, there is also mentioned some kind of unity within these, becoming a sense of essence or belonging: “This is what people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to b. [...]” (Woolf 2016:221).

There have already been many explorations of the conceptualization of multiplicity in nonbinary identity, Cordoba (2020) is not the first one that has made a description of how it presents. In fact, previously to his work, Monro (2005) “conceptualised gender as a spectrum, a field, or intersecting spectra or continua” (Monro 2005:37). Re-interpreting gender as a spectrum or a continuum territorializes, gives meaning to nonbinary gender identities in our culture.

There are no longer two fixed and unmovable monuments detached from each other by the seas of biological determinism. Instead of having a white and black approach to gender identity a liquid, fluid approach is acquired in cultural analysis. Notably, this type of approach echoes Woolf’s theory of the desirability of an androgynous mind. A mind that is capable of fluctuating to attain equilibrium between the feminine and masculine ends of a spectrum.

Of course, this conception of gender identity clashes with those previous interpretations of Orlando—even inside trans studies—who see the character as just making one straight transition from one point to another. This conception of gender as solely a binary invisibilises nonbinary identities such as genderfluid or genderflux or bigender identities.

For instance, Moon (2018) suggested that feelings and affective forces – which they referred to as “trans-emotionality” – were decisive in people’s decisions to embrace non-binary linguistic markers. Such emotions included gender disorientations and liminality, a feeling of being in-between genders. [...]It is through these feelings and affective embodiments that people are no longer constrained by the linguistic parameters of the gender binary, permitting a flourishing of gender subjectivities to emerge[...]. (Córdoba 2020:62)

Though it could be said that Woolf depicts what we can describe as ‘trans-emotionalities’⁸ in *Orlando*, as we have previously pointed out, it can also be argued that it is challenging to identify these trans-emotionalities, since it is as if it is a secret language which only can be identified by those who are familiar with it. Indeed, what can objectively be identified are the thoughts of gender subjectivity that are in profound disparity with cis binary counterparts which can make trans people feel profoundly isolated. These affections, a continuous sense of isolation is ever present throughout *Orlando*, in fact the first time Orlando speaks is to express that sentiment: “‘I am alone’, he breathed at last, opening his lips for the first time in this record.” (Woolf 2016:8). As the narrative advances she/he repeats: “‘I am alone’ said Orlando, aloud since there was no one to hear. That silence is more profound after noise still wants confirmation of silence” (Woolf 2016:130).

Theories around gender identity have been paired with written texts from a long time, to use as instances in which gender identities are “not only socially constructed, but how these identities are maintained, performed, [...]and interpreted by others” (Cordoba 2020:79). To identify how these gender identities perceived as deviant of the norm are composed, we need to understand its intricacies, since identity formation would always be “context-dependent and they vary over time, cross-culturally, and individually over the course of our lives” (Cordoba 2020:79).

Orlando often comments on what is socially constructed of binarism and participates in performance in various instances of the narration. Most importantly Virginia Woolf makes the entirety of *Orlando* a mocking criticism of this socially constructed and imposed identity, centering her attention on strict binary differences. These ‘hegemonic discourses’ are stated and mocked as for instance the impracticalities of women’s clothes when Orlando thinks protests to herself/himself that “‘if I wear skirts, if I can’t swim if I have to be rescued by a blue-jacket!’” (Woolf 2016:109).

For women are not [...]obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature. They can only obtain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life, by the most tedious discipline. ‘There’s the hairdressing’, she thought, ‘that alone will take an hour of my morning’; there’s looking in the looking glass, another hour;; there’s staying and lacing [...] (Woolf 2016:110)

⁸ Disorientations that take root on liminal spaces. Feelings and emotions of anyone who does not feel comfortable or feels his body disoriented when society ascribes to them labels such as ‘man’ and ‘woman’. A need to find a way of moving from binarism and finally finding a way of resisting cishnormativity.

The tone of this fragment speaks for itself, there is a hegemonic discourse identified by Woolf, dismantled, and deconstructed by Orlando's thoughts, to proceed to point the performative aspects of it. This is done many times, including over the different epochs Orlando inhabits as well as the different cultures he/she transverses.

Stepping away for a moment from assemblage theory, Cordoba uses other adjacent concepts that can become fruitful while analysing identity formation and how trans nonbinary subjects are often misinterpreted or simply not perceived. Butler, whose ideas are more of a Derridean flavour, named this misinterpretation:

Another important notion in the poststructuralist account of gender is Butler's (1993) concept of (un)intelligibility. She states that anyone who deviates from the hegemonic practices of gender and sexuality (for instance, non-binary people) is seen as socially impossible – or unintelligible. In terms of gender it could be argued that those that “deviate” from the hegemonic gender binary are seen as incoherent and hard to understand, given that there is a lack of general familiarity (Córdoba 2020:79)

The fact that previous readings obviated Orlando's gender identity construction as trans coded—as well as central part of the narration—might be related to the concept of unintelligibility. Those representations, even in fiction, that profoundly diverge from the hegemonic binary perception of gender are rendered as impossible; rejected even if its qualities are laid to see, or written in the plainest detail that was available at the time. Unintelligibility not only affects those who fail to perceive a nonbinary identity but can also affect the nonbinary individual in their process of self-reflection and self-perception; as Ahmed (2004) theorised a sense of utter discomfort inherent to ‘feeling queer’.

At the end of the novel, Orlando is an ongoing assemblage made of many emotionalities, memories and times. We have seen portrayed throughout the whole narrative the different levels in which Orlando's identity has come across. We have seen it at an individual level, Orlando's emotionalities and thoughts towards her own identity. Cordoba (2020) affirms that nonbinary emotionalities to territorialise their gender identities it may happen at three different levels in an individual (micro), interactional (meso), and societal (macro). Of course, these three levels theorised by Cordoba act in a relational way, in combination “also act as an assemblage” (Cordoba 2020:143). Therefore, on an individual level or micro level would be all the trans-emotionalities, in which Orlando territorialises his/her own identity, on an interactional level we can find all of these encounters Orlando has, for better or worse, including the Sasha episode, or even the interactions with the woman she/he meets while

crossdressing. On a societal level we have a clear example of society trying to erase the complexity of nonbinary Orlando's identity when they finally reject all her past and declare her/him a woman:

She was a party to three major suits which had been preferred against her during her absence [...] 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 [...] (Woolf 2016:119)

What transpires in this fragment is not dissimilar to what happens with the current legal state of nonbinary people in society. It is a mixture of intelligibility and contradiction. On one hand, the court declares Orlando dead as she/he has another appearance could not be the same person. On the other hand, he is a Duke and she/he must pay to her/his supposed children. The societal level of interaction is what cements Orlando's identity as a woman, despite her/his internal vacillations and androgynous mind.

Although it is not present in Virginia's original androgynous mind theory through the narrative structure, Woolf is able to locate all complexities that someone outside the binary perceptions of gender might encounter in this state of intelligibility. Certainly, it is not dissimilar to what Cordoba states that happens to those nonbinary individuals that participated in his sociological study.

During the sociological study of the formation and interaction of nonbinary identities, Cordoba describes the language used by many to refer to their gender identity as a narrative:

Consistent with this description of gender, forum users showed the fluidity and mobility of their genders in their narratives. Some described gender as a mobile object which appeared and disappeared in different places, shapes, and forms, often in unexpected ways. As such, gender fluidity was conceptualised as an affective intensity which had material properties. (Cordoba 2020:249-50)

Interestingly enough, we find several instances in which Orlando's sense of self is described in very similar terms, as "she belonged to neither [gender]; and indeed, for the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was a man; she was a woman. [...] It was a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind to be in". (Woolf 2016:112).

Since language must be used to describe embodiments of gender—we can fairly consider among many other things Orlando to be an attempt to do so—something elusive and complex we would often find poetical language used:

While language was used as a tool to describe the affective embodiments of gender, the material elements of gender – the way these are felt – cannot be entirely captured linguistically. For instance, this forum user employed a variety of

metaphorical devices to describe their gender fluidity. Notably, “sand running through my fingers,” “blending,” “mixing,” and “disappearing.” These metaphors allude to the materiality of gender as an affective force which can be transformed and behaves differently under different conditions. Yet, metaphors do not entirely capture the embodied experience of fluidity as an affective intensity since these nuances (in the form of feelings and desires) can exist outside of discourse. (Cordoba 2020:251)

There are several instances in which while thinking about her identity in conjunction with time Orlando thinks in metaphorical terms, as if the fluidity of the images escapes her/his mind continuously. It is the haunting of searching for the words to express the trans-emotionalities that provoke one’s gender when it escapes cisgender definitions of a binary. She/he talks about nets that want to catch “an inch of silver” (223) and never catch “the great fish who lives in the coral groves” (223). Here the nets are rather those conventions created by humanity that pretends to catch what is mysterious, natural. This metaphor can be read in different ways: the entire page is dedicated to the true self of Orlando. Being both an artist and a person whose sense of self is variable, he/she tries to encompass those emotions through the correct words to describe it. It is suggested that she/he is both the wild goose and the great fish that lives in the coral groves.

As we have proved, the way in which Cordoba uses assemblage theory to analyse gender identity is key for a better understanding of the internal monologue of Orlando since: “to theorise gender as an assemblage of multiple affective forces, including discursive and material forces. A material assemblage can include the body, physical contexts, and structures; whereas a discursive assemblage may include norms, gender roles, etc. [...]” (Córdoba 2020:83). Of course, territorialisation “works to stabilize the assemblage’s identity” (Córdoba 2020:83). Orlando himself is able to reterritorialise his identity as a man after his first transition. When his identity solidifies temporarily until his next transition in which his body changes, so does the world around her. After this, she creates new ways to territorialise her body by changing presentation: “Now she opened a cupboard in which hung still many of the clothes she had worn as a young man of fashion, and from among them she chose a black velvet suit richly trimmed with Venetian lace.[...] it fitted her to perfection and dressed in it looked the very figure of a noble Lord” (Woolf 2016:152). It is interesting that she tries first womanly clothes, after she/he feels the impulse to change she/he does change presentations again, by trying to express that “different though the sexes are, they intermix” (Woolf 2016:133).

Orlando experiences the loss of aspects of herself, the constant “progress” or becoming in which different times of affectivities consistently coexist. Time, as we would analyse in detail in the next section, is also another of the axes of the assemblage that continuously participate in the territorialisation of the present self.

‘I am grown up’, she thought, taking her taper. ‘I am losing my illusions, perhaps to acquire new ones’, and she paced down the long gallery to her bedroom. It was a disagreeable process, and a troublesome. But it was interesting, amazingly, she thought, stretching her legs out to her log fire (for no sailor was present), and she reviewed, as if it were an avenue of great edifices, the progress of her own self along her past. (Woolf 2016:123)

There is a juncture of Orlando’s space (her/his ancestral house) as well as her/his process of changing, becoming. Finally, despite being written during what we have decided to call modernism, Orlando possesses many of the traits that we would later see in postmodernist accounts of identity and how it manifests through language. Finally, we can say that Woolf’s theories regarding the androgynous mind are not incompatible with the affective reading of gender identity as an assemblage. Even if Woolf described only intuitively those parts of what the assemblage is conformed to, the capability of doing so reflects that her theories are clearly a precursor of how we understand gender identity now.

Therefore, the classic normative narrative of becoming up until Woolf’s *Orlando: A Biography*, the *bildungsroman*, is effectively dismantled as well. There is not a singular progression but a constant of states of change, of becoming. It is a constant challenge to the past conception of the constraints of being. This challenge of the narration regarding the formation of an identity is also a textual resistance, but let us not forget that identity is also formed through time.

3. Queer Time and Queer Historiography: Orlando transverses Time

3.1. Orlando and queer temporalities

The intersection between transgender identities and time has been a subject of study since the revolutionary essay by Halberstam *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005). Freeman describes queer temporalities as “[...] points of resistance to this temporal order that, in turn, propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others: that is, of living historically” (Freeman 2010:22). Queer temporalities as a theory proposed by Halberstam directly interact with queer “way of

life” an encompasses “subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance, forms of transgender embodiment, and those forms of representation dedicated to capturing these wilfully eccentric modes of being” (Halberstam 2005:1).

Queer temporalities—the result of the intersectionality of queer identities and alternate ways of experiencing time—have become one of the most important subjects of cultural discussion within queer studies. Queer temporalities, as discussed by, for instance, Pryor (2017), present alternative ways of living that go against expectations of straight time, offering as well innovative perspectives on ways of living. Often, these ways of living are non-linear and “defy normative patterns of clock, biological, and nuclear family time” (Pryor 2017:5).

Since the first time Halberstam coined the term, these altered time-lines had been openly associated to transgender individuals. Particularly, referring to trans nonbinary temporalities, Freeman states that “nonbinary identities often oppose to pre-established ways of living [...] inventing possibilities for moving through and with time, encountering pasts, speculating futures, and interpenetrating the two in ways that counter the common sense of the present tense” (Freeman 2010:15). Therefore, narrative structure comes again to define what could be established to be a representation of queer temporalities or what can be considered the contrary. For instance, linearity, which is conveyed in the choices made by authors to reproduce time as a sequence of arranged incidents, can be used to reaffirm binary structures. Namely, what is considered a valid “life,” stable identity markers both internal and external, a progression from infancy to adulthood without pause and the acceptable next steps to take to be considered “the right type of adult”—namely adequate puberty, having a partner, marriage, childbirth, and stable work.

Throughout Woolf’s work we find exactly what Freeman says constitutes a nonbinary temporality, since Orlando seems to challenge exactly what constitutes a clear linear narration depicting straight time. We have a time that is not neatly linear as it stretches from what is considered a normative perception of it, a character whose growth is stretched over a period of centuries as well as an altered order of coming of age due to fluctuating transition. The type of personal relationships Orlando establishes are also unstable. Thus, a trans nonbinary narrative would challenge the structural narrative of straight time and the state-sponsored time regulations, often resulting on temporal dislocation. Many have interpreted this particular fictional queer temporality—

as it is an alteration of time, a different way of living through it—but it also talks about the history of queer subjects within that great narrative of imposed time, breaking through binary paradigms, allegorising a gender fluid identity through Orlando's fluidity in time and gender.

The altered temporality within which Orlando operates also influences the narrative time. As previously mentioned, to present or explore these subjective or alternate futurities, it is necessary to use distinct narratological devices. In this current thesis we would analyse those narratological tools in relation to time alterations.

These narrative devices have already been analysed regarding other fields of writing—such as the fantastic—by Flora Botton Burlá (1977) whose thesis *Los Juegos Fantásticos* identifies different mechanisms by which postmodern authors alter notions of time in writing. We can state that Woolf, despite being a modernist writer, used some of these mechanisms and, in fact, it could be stated that she pioneered some of them.

I will approach the text by adapting some of these notions mentioned in Bottom's thesis, to comment on aspects of queer temporality as expressed in *Orlando: A Biography*. I argue that in Orlando, these narratological tools are used to express the subjective perception of time and to suggest alternative ways of conceiving time, thus, effectively representing a queer temporality.

To properly comment on Orlando's diverse instances of queer temporality we must first describe what constitutes the contrary. Freeman (2014) expresses that there are a series of patterns which the author called 'straight time' or 'straight temporality', a type of outline that exists within a chronobiological binary society:

[...]rhythms of gendered performance specifically, repetitions - accrete to "freeze" masculinity and femininity into timeless truths of being [...]repetition engenders identity, situating the body's supposed truth in what Nietzsche calls "monumental time" or static existence outside of historical movement. [...]In a chronobiological society, the state and other institutions, including representational apparatuses, link properly temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and change. These teleologies of living [...] such as marriage, accumulation of wealth, reproduction, childrearing, and death and its attendant rituals. Indeed, as the anthropologist John Borneman's work clarifies, so-called personal histories become legible only within a state-sponsored timeline (Freeman 2010:4-5)

Straight time then, as understood by Freeman, is a repetition throughout history that cements both binary realities and a chronobiological perception of what is 'proper' or 'normative', thus what becomes both legible and acceptable within society. There is a long string of repetitions of two paths of living: male and female. Once you are assigned to circulate through one of these two paths there will be a linear progression of birth,

puberty, marriage, childbirth and finally death. This is the accepted chronobiological straight time. Individuals are naturally expected to operate within this parameter for their lives to constitute a “state-sponsored timeline”, thus, accepted timeline.

Of course, non-linear ageing as we see in *Orlando*, goes against straight time since non-linear temporalities of disruption, disjuncture, and discontinuity are also against the natural progression of straight temporality. Straight time also demands different aspects of the self to be fixed throughout time. Neither Orlando’s identity nor Orlando’s progression in time is truly fixed. There is a constant fluctuation between gender presentations, a continuous flow between states of creation and productivity and states of contemplation and quietness.

As established before, queer subjects that traverse time, inscribed in a place (history) of this narrative of long stride of grand events would inevitably clash with straight time and straight history. Orlando seems to precariously navigate straight time, trying to emulate his ancestors in the beginning of the narration until after his fall out with Sasha, when we as readers officially encounter Orlando’s first-time clear time alteration:

One June morning—it was a Saturday the 18th—he failed to rise at his usual hour, and when his groom went to call him he was found fast asleep. Nor could he be awakened. He lay as if in a trance, without perceptible breathing; and though dogs were set to bark under his window; cymbals, drums, bones beaten perpetually in his room; a gorse bush put under his pillow; and mustard plasters applied to his feet, still he did not wake, take food, or show any sign of life for seven whole days. On the seventh day he woke at his usual time (a quarter before eight, precisely) and turned the whole posse of caterwauling wives and village soothsayers out of his room; which was natural enough; but what was strange was that he showed no consciousness of any such trance, but night’s slumber. Yet some change, it was suspected, must have taken place in the chambers of his brain, for though he was perfectly rational and seemed graver and more sedate in his ways than before, he appeared to have an imperfect recollection of his past life. (Woolf 2016: 43-44)

This fragment describes the first state of altered time that Orlando shows in his biography. Slow time⁹—a term that I use to refer to those stretched periods of time in which the individual body or the individual subjectivity stops interacting within the compulsory chronornativity—is also an alteration of that works against straight time. The temporal order is broken by the mere act of existing in a way that is not productive. Society reads the situation externally as time consuming and unprofitable as well as

⁹ Term made up in reference to the common expression “slow morning” or “slow evening” and the military term of slow time to exemplify states in which the individual is not actively being productive or active.

unnatural, as it is mockingly portrayed when the servants desperately try to wake Orlando.

It is also worth noting the curious fact that the two changes caused that transform Orlando there is some sort of trance—self-induced or not it is never stated clearly in the text—for seven days and seven nights, a formula that clearly refers to both folklore and the tradition of the Christian creation of the world in seven days. Woolf plays once again with the fantastic genre using its symbols to add mystery to Orlando's transition.

Moreover, it is not a coincidence that this trance is presented in the form of a profound slumber, since states of sleep have been used throughout literature as a metaphor adjacent to death. Thus, here a sleep “without perceptible breathing” and without any “sign of life” is a sleep that, as always, in mythology has been a brother to death. In fact, Orlando's biographer mentions in this regard his doubts as to whether Orlando “worn out by the extremity of his suffering, died for a week and then come to life again?” (Woolf 2016:45).

Sleep is always a transition between wakefulness and death, a state in which animals hibernate, although here Orlando chooses summer to do so, curiously the month of June; showing once again that there is something that goes against the established order of the world. Only after that true experience of his first love, the also androgynous Sasha, Orlando does become a ‘man’ to society. Everyone notices the change, or so we are told, as he “though he was perfectly rational and seemed graver and more sedate in his ways than before”. However, even though this transition ‘to manhood’ is finished at the eyes of society, soon in Orlando's internal dialogue we find the faults of his supposed masculinity. It is not the masculinity it should be when he chooses solitude and pursues the “great variety of ghosts” (Woolf 2016:46) of his ancestry.

What is most interesting about this fragment is that not only Orlando partakes in an alteration of time, effectively practicing a queer temporality, but this queer temporality is directly related to some sort of change in his endeavour. Orlando becomes a graver person, more melancholic, obsessed with meditations around the passage of time. Orlando “now took strange delight in thoughts of death and decay, and, after pacing the long galleries and ballrooms [...], looking picture after picture as if he sought the likeness of somebody whom he could not find [....]” (Woolf 2016:47). Although this appreciation might be rather speculative, subsequently there is a

meditation around all those models of masculinity that preceded Orlando. He cites all the previous names of his family, his exploits of war as he asks himself: “But all that killing and campaigning, that drinking and love-making, that spending and hunting and riding and eating, what remained? A skull; a finger” (Woolf 2016:54).

One wonders if Orlando’s declaration of his battle “to win immortality against the English language” (Woolf 2016:54), is not also a battle against the English language to end the same imposed temporality. After all, all his ancestors that partake in the ending is also an imposition of time and, above all, how that ending should arrive in the narrative is also imposed by the norm. That linearity is broken, it is the repetition of this established repetitive framework that he rejects. Orlando is the first to choose to create instead of battling and destroying otherness like his ancestors. The change of the grand narrative of his own family is a way of challenging chronobiopolitics. Thus, even presenting himself as a man, his masculinity will never be what his ancestors had. Orlando is unable to understand the usual cruelty among men and declares at the end of the chapter “I have done with men” (Woolf 2016:65).

The flight to Constantinople, which is both a psychological flight as well as a physical one, seems to demonstrate an urgent need to change, or perhaps to transition.

Next morning, the Duke, as we must call him, was found by his secretaries sunk in profound slumber amid bed clothes that were much tumbled. [...] No suspicion was felt at first, as the fatigues of the night had been great. But when the afternoon came and he still slept, a doctor was summoned. He applied remedies which had been used on the previous occasion, plasters, nettles, emetics, etc., but without success. Orlando slept on. [...] On the seventh day of his trance (Thursday, May the 10th) the first shot was fired and that terrible and bloody insurrection of which Lieutenant Brigge had detected the first symptoms. [...] The rioters broke into Orlando’s room, but seeing him stretched to all appearance dead they left him untouched, and only robbed him of his coronet and the robes of the Garter. And now again obscurity descends, and would indeed that it were deeper! (Woolf 2016: 92-93)

Once again, Orlando falls into a time alteration. It is interesting that a doctor is once again called, as it is during the first transition, therefore implying that what is a natural occurrence in the case of this character is seen as a malady by the society that surrounds him. It must be mentioned that there is a certain mystery with the ‘obscurity’ that descends upon Orlando and we are left to interpret it once again by Woolf.

In addition, Orlando falling into a transitory state of hibernation while in an “exotic place” is worth an even more comprehensive analysis considering the Orientalist trends present in the Victorian period. Furthermore, there is then, an adding

element of estrangement in Orlando's second transition that serves to tap playfully into the stereotypes of the time, in which strange things were justified by happenstance occurring in 'far away lands'. Orlando woke up again after the "seventh day of his trance" (Woolf 2016:92). The following fragment is well known and has already been discussed on many previous occasions. A triad of goddesses appears, also something typical of folklore or mythology, and the biographer explains that they have tried to intervene in Orlando's transition.

Though this fragment has been enough commented it is interesting to see if there are details that have been overlooked. The biographer describes the "opacity" (Woolf 2016:93) that permeates Orlando's transition. The following scene, it is purportedly ambiguous, Woolf does not specify if the appearance of the goddesses is some sort of metaphorical device employed by the biographer or in truth it is another fantastical element of the narration that the narrator is simply forced to convey despite the narrator's apparent bafflement. Rarely is it mentioned that these three personifications of concepts try to desperately intervene in Orlando's transition but they are banished. Chastity in particular expresses a rather negative opinion on Orlando: "Then *Our Lady Chastity* speaks: 'I am she whose touch freezes and whose glance turns to stone. [...] where my eyes fall, they kill. Rather than let Orlando wake, I will freeze him to the bone. Spare, O spare!'" (Woolf 2016:94).

The three sisters are exorcised as the narrator exclaims: "Horrid Sisters, go!" (Woolf 2016:95). What is left after Chastity, Purity, and Modesty—three of the supposed 'feminine' concepts that every proper Lady must have—is just Orlando, transformed, transitioned. Perhaps, it is a declaration that Orlando was never to be comfortable or clearly oriented as a cisgender straight woman. Possibly, then, it makes even more sense what follows: "The sound of the trumpets died away and Orlando stood stark naked. [...] His form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace" (Woolf 2016:96). This fragment is curious and works in contrast, since the narrator tells us that "we have no choice left but confess—he was a woman" (Woolf 2016:96). Then the narrator points out that the most beautiful body is, however, an androgynous body.

Despite this transformation, the biographer tells us that "Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been" (Woolf 2016:96). That is, his need to change, an imperative need to

express his disagreement with how he has come to be seen from the outside, how an ambassador, however, has not changed the nature of his soul. The body can change and conform to the soul's need for change, whatever it may be, but Orlando's core nevertheless remains the same. After this alteration of time Orlando has changed again effectively breaking with the straight linear progression of lifetime. The protagonist, of course, is aware of a difference between them and the rest of the people who surround her, so she decides to live with another group of people who are as well subalterns in the eyes of society.

Unfortunately, Orlando's difference is also in clash with the Romani's way of living as: "They began to suspect that she had beliefs than their own, [...] the [...] men and women thought it probable that she had fallen into the clutches of the vilest and cruelest among all the Gods, which is Nature" (Woolf 2016: 99). Although what follows is a description of the cultural differences between Orlando's culture and the nomadic people she/he is siding with, we cannot forget that in previous chapters Orlando has been forced to forsake both the company of men and women. Continuously, we see echoes of Woolf's theory of the androgynous soul.

One thing is clear, Orlando's identity is naturalised continuously both by the parallelism drawn between her/his appearance and nature as well as her continuous admiration for it both in her/his internal dialogue and by his/her writing. That constant clash with these two distinct groups makes Orlando distance herself from their company. Their language, their petty rules and cruelties seem to him incompatible, incomprehensible. He is too "girly" when he is read as a man and too independent and "masculine" when read as a woman.

Besides, it is interesting that right after this fragment in which we can perceive that, contrary to the Romani's suspicions, Nature is never put in direct opposition to Orlando but rather the opposite. The closest thing to Orlando's soul is his/her oak, and nature is the only thing Orlando seems to believe in his/her usual romantic solitude. It is perhaps nature, his/her own nature, what propitiates his/her need for change. Orlando progresses at a different pace than the rest as he/she ages differently as well as varies from a single existence as a man or a woman. Orlando's vacillations continue over time. There is an explanation as to why Orlando has a distorted/dislocated way of ageing. In fact, Woolf directly remarks on the subjective perception of time as the basis on which she builds the different way in which time affects Orlando:

But Time, unfortunately, thought 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, 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 that it should be and deserves fuller investigation. (Woolf 2016: 66)

This “investigation” seems to be part of what is behind Orlando’s writing as well as narrative use of time. Since “Woolf’s novels create an androgynous time” (Whitmore 2015:2) much in line with what first inspired the creation of Orlando as a character in the fluid, undivided way it is. In Orlando “time [...] is not controlled by external figures nor is a reaction against that control. It is rather a time that relishes in the breakdown of binaries, a time that exists when one is operating in multiple temporalities of external and internal life”. (Whitmore 2015:2). As Whitmore (2015) states, Orlando seems to bring the interior perception of her/his own time and make it her/his own altered lifetime. This time alteration is also described in Botton Burlá’s work, in which it is called “psychological time” (1977:191) a type of time alteration present in the fantastic genre in which subjective perception of time bends time around the individual. The best example of non-linear ageing and psychological time might be clearly stated towards the end of the novel in which Woolf talks about “the best practitioners of life” (Woolf 2016:217):

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. (Woolf 2016:218)

There is a direct criticism towards the imposture of time or straight temporalities. This fragment seems to be proof of both Woolf’s criticism of the genre of biography and the treatment of time. Once again, Woolf’s writing form of genre and philosophical theories about time and the androgynous mind seems to come together to fruition. Along with these innovations on time’s organisation and perception Woolf also depicted other alterations of time:

Here he came then, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. He saw the moon sickle and then circular; he saw—but probably the reader can imagine the passage which should follow and how every tree and plant in the neighborhood is described first green, the golden; how moons rise and suns set; how spring follows winter and autumn summer; how night succeeds day and 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. (Woolf 2016: 65-6)

Here, Woolf uses the concept of circular time—a periodical repetition of a series of occurrences in regular intervals of time (Burla 1977:192) —to evoke poetic images that can be found in traditional folklore beliefs. Time as described by Woolf is also accumulative, rather than just linear; one time does not disappear just because another layer of it is deposited in the same place. This coexistence is called “simultaneous time” (Botton Burlá 1977:192), which consists of the perception of “two or more historical times that touch each other” (192).

This vast, yet ordered building, which could house a thousand men and perhaps two thousand horses, was built, Orlando thought, by workmen whose names are unknown. Here have lived, for more centuries than I can count, the obscure generations of my own obscure family. Not one of these Richards, Johns, Annes, Elisabeths has left a token of himself behind him, yet all, working together with their spades and their needles, their love-making and their child-bearing, have left this. (Woolf 2016:71)

Meditations on continuity such as this one, serve us to talk about a highly contested point in Orlando's biography as a queer temporality such as her/his romance with Shelmerdine. Orlando's and Shelmerdine encounter is preceded by a moment in which Orlando is about to fall in another sleep:

Indeed, she was falling sleep with the wet feathers on her face and her ear pressed to the ground when she heard, deep within, some hammer on an anvil, or was it a heart beating? Tick-tock, tick-tock, so it hammered, so it beat, the anvil, or the heart in the middle of the earth; until, as she listened, she thought it changed to the trot of a horse's hoofs; (Woolf 2016:177)

The metaphor of the horse's hoofs as a hammer or a heart beautifully exemplifies a time wherein natural time transitions into chronometred, rigid time. Shortly before meeting Shelmerdine, whom she/he will marry, Orlando once again seemed not to want the company of any human being and was once again destined to fall into torpor, very similar to that of the previous ones. Only his encounter with a soul like his own, Shelmerdine, prevents her/him from doing so. We can only speculate what Orlando would have become then if he had fallen into a new streak of slow time. “‘You're a woman, Shell!’ she cried. ‘You're a man, Orlando!’” he cried” (Woolf 2016:178).

There is a clear element of self-identification projected on the other since “it seems Orlando recognises feminine features in Shelmerdine, as Shelmerdine recognises

masculine traits in Orlando” (De Souza 2017:32). This recognition in the other, as people who are equally excluded from belonging to a single category, is clearly represented in all subsequent interactions between these two people. However, this theory has been challenged by Mitchell who affirms that “Orlando’s queer subjectivity practically admits defeat [...]” by getting married, Orlando denies all the queer progress he has made before, this seems to deny the reality of the very writing in which Orlando is justified in marrying Shelmerdine precisely because of her androgyny and how well they fit together perfectly. In addition, there is quite to say about the pacing of romance between Orlando and Shelmerdine.

‘Madam’ the man cried, leaping to the ground, ‘you’re hurt!’

‘I’m dead, sir!’ she replied.

A few minutes later, they became engaged. The morning after, as they sat at breakfast, he told her his name. It was Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire.

(Woolf 2016: 177)

It can be said that perhaps this also constitutes a break from traditional linearity of courting rituals at the time. A time in which there were several steps to accomplish a proper engagement and was fiercely ingrained in society. This quickness and intensity might be seen as inappropriate in the time it is portrayed but seems again to be entirely natural for Orlando and Shelmerdine.

Nonetheless, there had been made more objections to Orlando’s temporal dislocation as a queer temporality in relation to his/her gender identity after she/he marries:

[...] it is still disappointing that Orlando[...] must sacrifice her gender play to become a wife and a mother. She must also submit to convention in order to become a successful writer, since Orlando’s work [...] is rendered less suspect and threatening by virtue of the fact that she is married. (English 2015:127).

English criticism of Orlando’s marriage and subsequent childbirth is understandable as the analysis of her line of thought renders acts that share similarities to those that we see through the accepted timeline as like those sociocultural straight ones. Several things can be said about this affirmation. Firstly, Orlando was a successful work (selling more than 3000 copies which constituted a best seller at the time), thankfully, not censored like Radcliffe’s work, which made possible that many queer individuals could access Woolf’s tale of gender nonconformity. However, Orlando marrying Shel was subjected to harsher critiques as well, as seen in:

The romance between Orlando and Shel, whom she finally marries, is another example of how compulsory heterosexuality eventually corrects homosexual attraction in the novel, although gender inversion plays a relevant role here with

regard to how Virginia Woolf constructs this heterosexual love affair. (García Madrid 2020:249)

There are several questions that we may inquire to address this criticism. Can you become a wife if you are not a woman? You can, of course, become a married person or a spouse. Can you become a mother if you are not a woman? You can be a birthing individual, for sure. If only some of Orlando's sex secondary characteristics have changed, and she/he continues to be something apart from one thing or the other, then, she/him is not a cisgender individual. Is it then something uniquely feminine to have a child? Perhaps it is not if Orlando has been able to do so despite being born as the opposite sex.

I also want to infer that even though to formalise her attraction Orlando needs to marry Shelmerdine during the nineteenth century, she hints that even though she still loves him ardently he also experiences attraction for other people as well. Is it monogamy then? What we may conclude is that it is not a "heterosexual love affair" if one of the two individuals is confirmed a queer person and the other one at least hinted as such.

Orlando's attraction to women, compulsory heterosexuality actually becomes compulsory homosexuality: if Orlando loved women in the first place, now same-sex attraction becomes the norm. The social order of heteronormative sexuality in Orlando is inverted, although disguised in fantasy—which is why the novel might not have been classified as an indecent text as it was Radclyffe Hall's. (García-Madrid 2021:186)

Here García-Madrid obviates the fact that even though Orlando seems to favour people of feminine gender expression, his/her attraction for Sasha's masculinity is only held back by the mores of the age, which would have deemed it "unbecoming". Thus, Orlando's attraction encompasses men and women, favouring those with which he/she can sense the same type of soul as is the case with Shelmerdine. This is what the text would hint at, rather than a lesbian inclination—a multigender individual, and her/his queer desire:

In order to comply with the heterosexual norm, the Archduke conceals his homosexuality with a female disguise. However, despite Orlando's transformation into a woman, the Archduke's love towards the protagonist prevails: it is some love that ignores the limits of sex. Compared to Orlando's lesbianism, in this case the homosexual desire turns into a heterosexual one, but compulsory heterosexuality has already been challenged. I would even say that the Archduke's revelation of his homosexual desire towards male Orlando in the first place—although never described in such terms—overshadows the fact that it becomes a heterosexual desire. The heterosexual regime is overthrown and homosexuality occupies the

public space—both in the text and in the socio-cultural arena in the form of a successful novel. (García-Madrid 2021:188)

When affections continue despite one's gender or sex changing, we may as well call it what it is: bisexuality, pansexuality or simply polysexual attraction in any of its forms. As established, Virginia Woolf made a conscious effort to eviscerate binary notions of gender, it is surprising to say the least that García-Madrid seems to overlook the obvious, Woolf did exactly the same for romantic and sexual attraction. Virginia Woolf is intelligent enough in her narration to use the ambiguity of Shel's identity together with Orlando's transformation too; in this case, Beers analysis of what transpires seems more accurate than Madrid's:

Halberstam's description of queer time stands in opposition to a heteronormative linear timeline of progression, to state that Orlando's marriage to Shelmerdine negates Orlando's queer subjectivity seems to ignore the fact that trans individuals can also marry and have children, though their timeline may not completely align with heteronormative suggestions. Further, the act of marriage, [...] does not negate her history as a man, nor her transformation, nor erase her previous interactions with queer temporality. (Beers 2020:19)

Furthermore, queer desire does not disappear once Orlando has fluctuated toward a feminine presentation. Orlando expresses her desire towards women. Different affectivities may interact and often sexual or romantic attraction, being both of them two separate things, can interact with gender presentation or gender identity depending on the subject. Nonetheless, despite the many romantic/sexual protagonist's relationship Woolf's dedicates, logically a novel that relies on textual ambiguity would be inclined to represent sexual and gender identities that present multiplicity and—as Ländström affirms—polysexual attraction rather than homosexual or “a subversive vision of heterosexual desire” (García-Madrid, 2021:250).

The pansexual or bisexual attraction pattern evidenced by Orlando is emphasized many times, such as in the quote that she “enjoyed the love of both sexes equally” (108). Furthermore, Orlando marries Rosina Pepita (64) and later Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire (129). (Ländström, 2016:23)

The disintegration of straight-time and compulsory heteronormativity comes in Orlando in different ways throughout her/his queer temporality.

Woolf achieves to describe an ambiguous sexuality in one single person, and this can be easily seen by analysing Orlando's affairs. He is not attracted by women with feminine stereotypical traits. Looking at his relation with Sasha, the first thing we notice is that he prefers women with a masculine charm. In all his relations, the women for whom he felt sexual attraction had some masculine characteristics. Sasha is the one leaving him and he is the devastated one; Sasha is less talkative and this is a traditionally masculine characteristic. In his relation with the

Archduchess Harriet who is “very tall” he is attracted by her masculine features, not being aware that he is actually feeling sexual desire toward a man. [...] Since Orlando feels attracted by a woman who in fact is a man, it is an evidence that Orlando’s sexuality is considered androgynous since he experiences sexual desires toward women-manly. (Brasovean 2018: 19)

To obviate the fact that Woolf has described several affective moments between several queer individuals, making Orlando’s desire to other bodies openly queer in essence is to forget the ambiguous effect that Woolf was looking to achieve within the entire narration.

Even if Woolf is forced to mask certain aspects of queer desire to navigate the flimsy line of censorship under the long shade of Victorian mores, she does so astutely and with style pointedly adding ruptures to the exterior, suggestions of queerness at every chance. Worthy of note is how the mixture of genres are part of the masking technique used by Woolf. There is a perfect marriage between the fantastic elements and the performative elements of different gender presentations and perceived crossdressing. Followingly, Ländström argues that even giving birth is compared to one of Orlando’s transitions:

[...] The second mirroring of the transition is when Orlando is about to give birth to a child, and the segment leading up to that mentions the three sisters who tried to cover Orlando during the transition, Purity, Chastity and Modesty, and the biographer wishes they would come back and try to hide Orlando once again. Furthermore, Constantinople is mentioned, where the transition took place, and directly after Orlando’s child is born, there are three asterisks marking an elliptical break between who she was before and who she is after. Asterisks like these are only present after the transition scene and the birth scene, heavily implying a connection between the two events. (Ländström 2016:21)

With these examples it is clear that Woolf uses every opportunity to depict subtle deviations from the norm, instances in which even when Orlando seems oriented to straight temporality, it is in truth influenced by queerness. Woolf presents an entanglement of queer temporality and non-normative ways of orienting desire that complement each other to expand our understanding of what constitutes a queer temporality.

Finally, time for queer individuals is another axis where their identities interact, clash, and create alternatives. It is only, then, when their identities and bodies are inscribed in straight time. Nonbinary trans individuals’ presence in literature allows for precedents and examples of alternative timelines and temporalities. The exploration of queer temporalities in Orlando also proposes another interaction with the different ways

in which we interact with time, and one of the most important ones is history. Thus, in the next section we will analyse the intersection of trans queer temporalities and history.

3.2. Orlando and the Elizabethan Period

Firstly, I aim to understand why Woolf begins the narration of her novel precisely during the Elizabethan period. Through the writing of *A Room of One's Own*, Shakespeare is mentioned, and during the year in which she wrote both texts, Virginia wrote essays on Shakespeare. The Elizabethan era was also very present in one of the trips Virginia made with Vita to Kneole which she describes in her diary in detail: “all the centuries seemed lit up, the past expressive, not dead at all [...] so we reached the days of Elisabeth quite easily” (Woolf 1982: 125).

Woolf traces the past back to a peak moment in English history, resonating with the rest of the ideas that were circulating in her head during that year. However, what is more interesting, and has already been suggested by other scholars, is Shakespeare's relationship with cross-dressing games. Shakespeare—played with the boundaries of the literary genres to include innovations that stretched its limits. *Orlando's* narrator, who acts as his/her biographer, decides to begin to explain Orlando's life when he is sixteen. Not only the time in which the narration begins is important to understand the consequent work but also the terms employed in which it does:

The book starts off by describing Orlando slicing at the severed head of a Moor with his blade and imagining himself engaging in battle beside his father and grandfather. This masculine image is almost immediately juxtaposed with a description of him that is phrased in predominantly feminine terms [...] This description focuses on the softness and beauty of his features, a method of description most commonly associated with females. Although this could be perceived as a minute deviance from standard protocol, it is significant to note because Woolf has already begun the process of disassembling the accepted and promoted binary standards of sex and gender expectations [...]. These discrete variances from the expected interpretation of the world slowly acclimate her reader to the notion of sex and gender being disengaged from each other and ultimately replaced with an androgynous personhood that comfortably pulls from all realms of personal attributes. (Hastings 2008:30)

Hastings affirms that not only when it is located *Orlando: A Biography* in history is relevant but it is also carefully chosen to be intertwined with notions of gender. In short, the way in which the historical scenes are described by Woolf's narration is indicative of what would follow regarding Orlando's gender identity throughout the rest of his/her biography.

Orlando's presentation reminds us of the young actors who interpreted women's parts in the Elizabethan theatre. The fact is that "gender masquerade had also become quite popular in Renaissance literature, 'often associated with transgressive desires' and 'potentially homoerotic renderings,' which might have also been an inspiration for Woolf due to her interest in the period" (English 2015, 117). Clearly, these masquerades of gender, in particular "the androgynous heroines from Shakespeare's romantic comedies such as *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and *Merchant of Venice* particularly inspire Woolf's creation of the gender-crossing Orlando" (Froula 1990:129).

Gallagher points out another of the curious associations that Woolf makes with Shakespeare: it is impossible to read Orlando's gender presentation on the Elizabethan era and not to think of Viola or Rosalind. It is interesting that to create her Orlando, Woolf mixes two characters of *As You Like It*, one a woman who cross-dresses and a man who learns how to be one from a woman. It is a way, perhaps, to continue to use her parodic tone to point out the limitations of binary understanding of the world, a fact that Shakespeare sometimes points out in many of these plays.

Moreover, since women were prohibited to act in plays, this favours identity games like the one we see for example in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, in which Viola/Cesario ends the play by kissing Orsino dressed as Cesario and being Cesario in the eyes of everyone; how Orsino already loved him as Cesario, but his love cannot be fully explicit until he is revealed as Viola, just as Orlando is not allowed to speak to Sasha until she is revealed as a woman despite her androgynous appearance and, perhaps, androgynous soul. After all, in Orlando "Woolf dramatizes this theory of androgyny through the use of Shakespeare as an inspirational figure whose poetry transcends sex" (Gallagher 2008:4).

These limitations are fairly clear since the beginning it is an emulation of feats of his forefathers what is alluded in the text: "Orlando's fathers had ridden in fields of asphodel, and stony fields, and fields watered by strange rivers, and they had struck many heads of many colours off many shoulders, and brought them back to hang from the rafters. So too would Orlando, he vowed" (Woolf 2016:13). The head is out of reach as it is the chivalric past of Orlando's ancestors. "Woolf writes alongside Shakespeare throughout the entire Sasha episode and its aftermath by parodically framing Orlando as flawed chivalric heir, Petrarchan lover, terrible poet and self-indulgent melancholic" (Gallagher 2008:35).

Woolf uses a period that she perceived as full of possibilities in English history, a period commonly associated with adventure and the beginning of the grandeur of the British Empire to initiate the narration of Orlando.

Studies of Renaissance sexuality continue to operate from within a teleological paradigm in which “their” sexuality is not only knowable and different from “ours,” but is also a precursor to our own, both unlike and like us. Rarely, if ever, does it suggest that the idea of a consequential continuum might itself be problematic, that it might in fact be the biggest roadblock to thinking about desire as a disruptive figure, and as a challenger of hierarchy. (Menon 2008:47)

Virginia Woolf seems to understand that the desire of that epoch was ‘disruptive’ in some ways. The manner in which it is explored during the depiction of this time in Orlando is a tandem of personal relationships and social ones. There are different levels then: the internal one, which consists of the personal story of Orlando’s family and position, and the personal affections of the protagonist.

In Shakespeare’s works, love between men or bisexual love is veiled through gender presentation confusion since in *Twelfth Night* the love between Cesario and Orsino seems more prevalent and honest than that of Orsino for Olivia. Often the subtleties of queer love do not pass underappreciated by other queer authors (such as Woolf) who tend to re-interpret the particular flavour of queer-coding and queer subtext in their own way.

In summary, the fact that Woolf chose the Elizabethan period as the starting historical point for *Orlando: A Biography* is clearly in line with the fact that he considered Shakespeare as an example of an androgynous mind and therefore an inspiration to create a character to respond to this example. Not only does he use a name present on a Shakespeare’s play where there is play with gender presentation but also uses some elements of Shakespeare’s crossdressing heroines together to both comment on notions of the masculinity of the time and make a comment on the gender conventions of her present.

3.3. Orlando and queer historiography

History is intrinsically part of *Orlando: A Biography*, since it is embedded in the text's formation as well as. We follow the passage of centuries from the Elizabethan period to the end of the narration in the present time while it was being written, 1928. We can consider it the third party of what lies at the foundation of the narration—a dialogue of gender indented with queer temporalities—in the mists of a long string of succession of events that constitutes what we call history. Nonetheless, the relation of queer subjects and history has always been complex, since “[...] queer life is unbecoming for history and its disadvantages—and thereby offers a propitious opportunity for extemporalizing on time itself” (McCallum and Tuhkkanen, 2011:10). Woolf, as many of the other subjects she comments in *Orlando: A Biography*, makes a commentary on many of the preoccupations that queer historiography has proposed in postmodernity, being once her work once again ahead of her time.

Going back again to Shakespeare, as Woolf did to write *Orlando*, while thinking about the relationship between queer temporalities and history Freeman was the first to make evident the relation to the effect of ‘dislocation’ that queer subject creates within any recount of history:

[...] we might read Shakespeare a bit more literally. For when Prince Hamlet says that “the time is out of joint” he describes time as if its heterogeneity feels like a skeletal, or at least deeply somatic, dislocation. In this famous phrase, time has, indeed is, a body; the disruption of present by past and the resulting disunity of the present seem visceral. [...] time as body, [...] or the sphere of official politics and national history, form a joint: the body and the state are, rather than mere metaphors for one another, mutually constructing. [...] Centered on a protagonist who eschews the marriage plot or even its alternative, the revenge plot, Shakespeare's play freezes narrative movement, political/historical progression, and psychic development. [...] Hamlet's disarticulated body, as well the bodies of those around him, both registers and performs time's heterogeneity. Indeed, the very manner in which Claudius murders King Hamlet effects generational disarray and somatic disintegration (Freeman 2010:14-5)

In many ways *Orlando* participates in this ‘dislocation’ and ‘disjointment’ from the “official national history”. *Orlando* as a historic body or even as a body in history participates in the disunity of official historical narratives centered on cisgender bodies and straight time. *Orlando* has been inscribed in the most important periods of British history, as it becomes one of the most important Empires ever known. From the time of the Elizabethan era to the Victorian era *Orlando* is there, as he/she resists assimilation to

the grand narrative of official history. As an insoluble body, the currents of the grand narrative are incapable of devouring him/her and spitting her/his bones.

Orlando's stance is presented as an alternative way of not only existing in history but opening the possibility of making another type of history or historiography. Thus, *Orlando: A Biography* can be read as acts of reclaiming the past. To write history in a way that makes the historical experience of queer folks known is to shape the cultural landscape of marginalised communities, to create affective links with the past through historiography. It is a statement of affirmation in the face of compulsory straight history.

For instance, Moffat explores the benefits of interrogating different genres—including queer life writing—to create “a synthetic exercise of finding a middle ground between the past and the present, but an electrical ground between theory and history” (Moffat 2015:221). These assess the possibility of bridging queer writing to queer historiography. Queer experience in history is difficult to find, often omitted or censored. The result of trying to find the trace of queerness in historiography would always be a half-smudged picture, fragmented, open to the scrutiny of the official narrative that would negate its soft murmurs between the centuries.

As suggested previously, time—as perceived by what is considered official temporalities—is generally regarded as a grand historical narrative which is linear, homogenic. This grand narrative becomes the background in which the rest of individual narratives must find a place or adhere. Nonetheless, narratives based on subjectivities infer in the concept of temporal dislocation: the reality of life writing which opposes and deconstructs the construct of linearity of time and opposes the “grand narrative” provided since birth. This is to say that, queer life's—and in particular trans lifetimes—arises as a way of alternative temporality and thus, alternate history. There is a particular way in which gender, seen as a cultural regulated practice, can procure one course or another in life and in history:

Gender in *Orlando* is a historically specific cultural process, a matter of literary forms and legal institutions, psychology and medicine, fashion and social customs. Woolf's point here anticipates Foucault's in *The History of Sexuality*: namely, that gender and sexuality are constructed over time through an array of institutions and discourses. [...] Setting Vita's life in a fictional version of that emerging discourse produces the modernist transgenre that invites us to read across temporal moments. (Caughie 2013:518)

It is certainly impossible to deny that Woolf saw a link between those who were gender deviant—gender non-conforming, or any type of gender dissidence—as seen as an

alteration to normative structures. In fact, Woolf mentions in *A Room of One's Own* her interest in history:

Lately my diet has become a trifle monotonous; history is too much about wars; biography too much about great men; poetry has shown, I think, a tendency to sterility, and fiction - but I have sufficiently exposed my disabilities as a critic of modern fiction and will say no more about it. (Woolf 1977: 117)

The dissatisfaction against how history is narrated, being “too much about wars” can point us as to why Woolf does not reflect on this grand narrative even more than in a tangential way. Perhaps, Woolf’s discontent on how history was narrated at her time explains why during *Orlando*, the narrative voice, those of a historiographer as well as a biographer, takes account of Orlando’s life in an unconventional way to say the least.

The grand narrative of history as hetero-centered and as a long string of ‘grand acts’ by great men has been contested by queer individuals:

Indeed, anything other than hetero-historicism is described as a projection of the present onto the past; this projection is then coded as being narcissistic and “premature.” The recoil from homohistory thus equally recoils from a narcissism that must be disavowed in favor of compulsory heterotemporality. It is this homophobic heterohistory that forms the template within which studies of desire locate themselves in relation to the past. (Menon 2008:2)

That is another reason why I describe *Orlando* as participating in the disruption of this ‘hetero-historicism’ by rejecting ‘heterotemporalities’ and exploring a desire to describe the life of an undying queer throughout the history of one of the most hetero mythologised recollections of national history such as British history.

The narrator of *Orlando* is not the only one to participate in this ‘dislocation’ since the protagonist also participates of queer historiography something that Freeman points out by arguing that: “[...]Orlando begins to practice erotohistodography more methodically than his tomb fondling’s suggest, for he becomes obsessed with official history’s cast-offs (Freeman 2010: 109)”. In Freeman’s analysis of *Orlando*’s queer historiography, the academic focuses her analysis on the “lesbian fingerplay” of history (Freeman 2010: 110) identifying the hand as a symbol and the “penetration” of porous hands in time. In my stance, I think that what is most interesting about *Orlando*’s fascination with history outcasts is that in a way he/she is signaling themselves as a historic outcast. Their time is misaligned with the straight common temporality so he perceives other outcasts as the only historical figures to which he/she can relate.

Dinshaw explored the possibility “of collapsing time through affective contact between marginalized people now and then” (Dinshaw 2007: 178) “for partial, affective

connection, for community, for even a touch across time” (Dinshaw 1999:21); these touch across time extends from past to present. Dinshaw upholds that “queers can make new relations, new identifications, new communities with past figures who elude resemblance to us but with whom we can be connected partially by virtue of shared marginality, queer positionality” (Dinshaw 1999:49). Orlando is not only a subject of a queer temporality, a recreation of a possible queer person living historically but in another twist of the screw Woolf also investigates Orlando’s thoughts on affective identifications with past outcasts, making another metaphor for queer subjects in clash with straight time and history.

We can affirm that by identifying himself with these queer figures, Orlando is exerting ‘affective historiography’ as Dinshaw conceives it “developing queer history through the concept of affective connection—a touch across time—and through the intentional collapse of conventional historical time” (Dinshaw 2001:203). In a way, us as readers of Orlando’s biography, together with the narrator—the biographer sometimes turns into a historian—we interact with Orlando in the same way, following the passing of centuries of British history. The mere possibility of a queer trans individual traversing time and history creates the affective connection through his/her identity of the catalogue of queer temporality inscribed in the grand narration of straight time. Referencing Caughie’s interpretation of Orlando again, it is conveyed that “Woolf makes the art of prose fiction, specifically temporality and narration, central to identity” and “breaks down arbitrary historical divisions, renews the past in the present, immerses us in time, dramatizes how life and literature acquire a shape, and a value, within multiple pasts and always in relation to a present moment” (Caughie 2013:503).

Usually, history is presented as a series of events as well as famous personalities in which individuals are prompted to find examples to model themselves after, a significantly normative narrative that cannot be altered or changed. Nonetheless, at the root of queer historiography there is an urgency to signal those practices and queer individuals that silently populated history, alternative modes of living that might change our perception of history by virtue of taking notice of their existence. Undeniably, the way in which history is entwined with the biographic elements of *Orlando: A Biography* cannot be merely anecdotal:

History in Orlando occupies a unique space. It modulates between the background and the foreground of the text, and though England’s history and monarchy appear ubiquitous in the narrative, Woolf makes it malleable, using history to highlight changes in Orlando then letting fade into backdrop once more. History does not

frame the text; instead, Woolf uses changes in Orlando's identity to frame history. (Wingenroth 2019: 41)

Orlando's subjective perception of time not only shapes his own temporality but also shapes the history he transverse as well as the interpretation of previous events, effectively turning upside down the grand narrative of time. This is another way in which the character of Orlando bends the text and with it the genres it presents, such as historical fiction, both influence each other until they are indistinguishable. These subjectivities have been commented in relation to how queer individuals challenge the established narrative of history:

Queer and transgender subjectivities remind us that it is possible to live, at least in part, outside of or in opposition to the time of capital, and to challenge timelines that presume the inevitability of linear gender and sexual development. (Pryor 2017: 5)

History is made of a rigid framework that only has into account perceived objectivity of arranged facts presented in a linear way. Orlando's historiography, on the other hand, seems to depart from that 'objective' way of presenting history.

Straight time produces impossibly limited frameworks for queer and trans life. [...] because not only the workday but the entire life cycle is plotted and periodized, certain kinds of events and relationships get historically recorded, such as births, marriages, and deaths, while others, such as coming outs, friendships, caretaking, casual sex, separations, gender transitions, non-monogamous relationship structures, illness, ritual, and contact with the dead, do not. This is tautology at its worst: those whose life experiences neatly fit into a socially constructed notion of time get recognized, while those that cannot be made to fit, because they require a different understanding of time or history to make sense, are rendered invisible. (Pryor 2017:11)

Woolf's entire novel is a celebration of those "invisible experiences". The focus is on these unrecorded events, now recorded and rendered more important by Orlando's biographer subverting what is considered important or not to record, namely Orlando's relationship with the sex workers, his/her gender transitions and gender disorientations, his/her writing of poetry even his/her internal relationship with time from a queer temporality standpoint. Therefore, what is recorded in most detail in Orlando's biography is precisely what goes against straight time. It is the record, the historiography of what is excluded from the grand narrative of straight history.

There is a productive discussion perhaps for the first time opened by Woolf in which the private and public spheres are not separated or seen as incompatible but are intermixed and presented as of the same importance. For instance, the visit of Queen Elizabeth is presented as important as Orlando's engagement with Shelmerdine, both

experiences creating echoes on Orlando until the end of the narration in a non-hierarchical way.

There are other time alterations to consider while analysing Orlando in relation to historiography. Woolf's experimental techniques of time alteration rely on several symbols to debate about the nature of time as perceived by a queer individual in disjoined time and history. Woolf goes beyond it, contraposing Orlando's perception of time and equating it constantly as something organic and, thus, natural while the images of the clock, of the mores and customs of the centuries seem to be the enemies of the intuitive natural trans temporality of Orlando. The compelling use of the creation of a richer past for queer individuals suggests also a richer future:

The transsexual in Orlando is a figure of such future embodiment. The centrality of writing in this narrative, the emphasis on metaphoric language and literary history and the explicit discussions of writing's difficulties, present life writing not as an account of a life lived, but as the deliberate shaping of a narrative of a life that might be lived, and livable. (Caughie 2013:517)

The fact that Orlando writes throughout the history of England, that his life is being accounted as a 'biography', as Caughie affirms, shapes both the possibilities of a narrated life and what is narratively possible as a form of expression. Orlando continues to be an exercise of *myse en abyme*, since both the narrator and Orlando practice queer historiography: one describing a queer temporality inscribed in history and the other by the act of creating a poem to that is both a representation of himself/herself and a metaphor of the shaping narrative that provokes her/his writing.

There is also an account of chrononormativity and imposed organised time through the end of the novel that I think is important to address. This account is used primarily to demonstrate how Woolf directly portrays the clash of queer temporality against chrononormativity and its relation with intelligibility of a nonbinary way of living. The concept of chrononormativity was first described by Freeman in *Time Binds* (2010) as follows:

I'll refer to as chrononormativity, or the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity. And I mean that people are bound to one another, engrouped, made to feel coherently collective, through particular orchestrations of time. [...]Chrononormativity is a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts. Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate [...]hidden rhythms; forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege. Manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time. (Freeman 2010:3)

Before the nineteenth century chrononormativity was still at bay. Institutions had yet to impose calendars; productivity by the imposture of chrometered time was still being installed in every single aspect of life. Time circulated differently before its circulation was coerced to take only a shape. Vehemently, the perception of time was bended towards a unified way of it, its exigence was felt by many. From the eighteenth to the nineteenth century a series of dramatic changes shook societal organisation to its core:

No sooner had the words left his lips than the first stroke of midnight sounded. Orlando then for the first time noticed a small cloud gathered behind the dome of St Paul's. As the strokes sounded, the cloud increased, and she saw it darken and spread with extraordinary speed. At the same time a light breeze rose and by the time the sixth stroke of midnight had struck the whole of the eastern sky was covered with an irregular moving darkness, [...] 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. (Woolf 2016: 159)

There is a powerful sense of something essentially changing from one century to the other. Once again Woolf's intuitive comments on history are spot on and perfectly encapsulate one of Freeman's theories about the change of time perception in modernity. Woolf might have seen part of these changes in her lifetime, this fragment accounting it ominously using the symbols of the strokes. It is described as a "turbulent welter of cloud" and "darkness" and "confusion". The natural fluctuation of time, reigned until now by subjective perceptions, is forcibly tamed by the machinery that marks it: clocks. Actually, the creation of this effect is commented by Woolf on one of his diaries' entries:

"[...] So I shall get some effect of years passing; and then there will be a description of the lights of the eighteenth century burning; and the clouds of the nineteenth century rising. Then on to the nineteenth. But I have not considered this. I want to write it all over hastily and so keep unity of tone, which in this book is very important." (Woolf 1982:167)

From this point onwards the narration accelerates to its end. The previous centuries are narrated seemingly leisurely, with all types of Orlando's life details being provided. Even though Woolf again expresses the naturality of her narrative choices it is interesting that once again Woolf is precluding the concept of hidden imposed rhythms and chrononormativity. This institutionalised time, with timetables, specific moments, and quickness, seems also to clash with those individuals like Orlando that already had trouble before with straight time. It is likely that the reflection around time in relation with the protagonist's identity is accentuated with the arrival of an imposed time which

Woolf accounts as a powerful influence that even hijacks the mind's protagonist: "It was not Orlando who spoke, but the spirit of the age. But whichever it was, nobody answered it" (Woolf 2016:174).

There is, however, another important change more accentuated by this clash of times, the psychological time (or subjective time) and the chronormativity or imposed time. Nearing the end of the text, as many centuries have passed, Orlando is inclined to meditate on the passage of time.

In the eighteenth century, we knew how everything was done; but here I rise through the air; I listen to voices in America; I see men flying; [...] and she had a vision of innumerable coloured stuffs [...] strange smells; and each time the lift stopped and flung its doors opened, there was another slice of the world displayed [...] Honestly, though she was now thirty-six, she scarcely looked a day older. (Woolf 2016:215-16)

After there is a conflation or a crossing of moments of history, in which Orlando seems to see the face of Sasha again, she/he remembers all the queens and kings she has known while she/he is obtaining sheets at a department store. All of her/his personal history with London passes through her/his eyes in just one hour while she/he is pressed to the implacable quickness of modern time as a scheduled thing. Finally, she ends up expressing this clash by saying that "Time has passed over me. [...] How strange it is! Nothing is any longer one thing." The scene ends when the narrator tells us that "Her eyes filled with tears" (Woolf 2016:217).

There are other important elements to relate to queer historiography at the end chapters of the text. From the beginning we are told that "the house was haunted by a great variety of ghosts" (Woolf 2016:46). During that time Orlando invests a lot of time in visiting the tomb of his ancestors and trying as he/she "sought the likeness of somebody who could not find" (Woolf 2016:47), as Freeman (2010) suggested, Orlando practices queer historicism in this first exploration of his house's ghosts.

Queer historicism involves an openness to the "affective investments of the present in the past and hence to "the possibility of being haunted, even inhabited, by ghosts," [...] As a critical practice, queer historicism adopts a model of "spectral" historical analysis that, [...] eschews both the "necrological" model that buries the past by categorizing and containing its artifacts, and the "colonial" model that appropriates the past by mastering and silencing the "other". (Digangi 2006:134)

Orlando comes across other queer people throughout the novel and seems to recognise them in different periods of time. The history of oppression of queer people makes these instances described in the novel with highly coded language. As stated before, Woolf makes what is invisible essential to her narration in *Orlando*. Freeman (2010) comments

the gap left by the absence of queer history, the dark side of the moon of straight history and the grand narrative, a void that cannot exist without the very existence of what it points at. To feel its presence, the queer individual that practices queer historiography must perceive themselves as haunted and haunting the spaces of time that you have populated, as Orlando does towards the end of the novel. What is different and singular, might be misunderstood without the knowledge of what is the presence of a haunting. The queer historiographer sees in their mind those discomfited parts of themselves that are intermingled with the heritage queer individuals do not possess.

Indeed, Woolf seems to talk about silenced parts of history, to rebel on what is absent from the grand narrative, what exists despite these absences or more accurately, because of the absences of queer historiography straight history is the only presence apparently fully articulated. What is left is a sense of nostalgia, of inarticulate yearning that permeates the end of the narration in the same measure that Orlando's ongoing process of becoming.

“Derrida's claim that “haunting” describes the “staging of an event”, which I take to be inclusive of both bodies and objects. Because such staging allows for the appearance of past histories, I argue that Ahmed's embodied phenomenology materializes Derrida's notion of hauntology. This notion pervades Ahmed's reflections on how (dis)orientation is revelatory through the spectral histories embedded within their materiality. Hence, queer phenomenology becomes a hauntology that enables thinking the radical malleability of sociality given its multi-textured materiality.” (Faust 2019:2)

As Faust affirms, Ahmed's disorientations also can emerge in this temporal dislocation of queer temporalities, thus extending to queer historiography. Being at odds or in discomfort with the chrononormativity makes the queer individual prompt to identify what lays at the bottom of such discomfort. When interrogating such discomfort, looking back and projecting forward is when we find through the structure of the historical narration the notion of hauntology, a sense of haunting.

There are several levels in which the final part of the narration is haunted, thus, the haunting is multiple, as are the layers of Orlando's history and identity entangled. While she/he abruptly returns to her/his ancestral home, after the different times of her/his memories overlap during her trip to London, Orlando is assaulted by an imperative thought: “‘Haunted!’ she cried, suddenly pressing the accelerator. ‘Haunted! Ever since I was a child. [...]’” (Woolf 2016:223). There is then, some reflection on her identity that has always been “haunted”, something, perhaps, that was different since she/he was a child, a sense of being othered constantly without being able to fully

articulate why. Probably, the feeling of queer *hauntology* expressed by Orlando is the haunting of the subjects disoriented in a straight society: “So she was now darkened, stilled, and become, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self. And she fell silent. [...] when communication is established, they fall silent (Woolf 2016:225).

Thus, both the house is haunted—by its pasts and history—and Orlando, who is haunted by his own queerness and sense of location in correlation with history. Finally, there is a sense of detachment, of numbness: “The house was no longer hers entirely, she sighed. It belonged to time now; to history [...]” (Woolf 2016:227). Throughout *Orlando* there is a continuous back and forth of Orlando trying to inscribe herself/himself in history, moments in which she/he asks herself/himself “what phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting-place of dissemblables!” (Woolf 2016: 124). Others in which the “phantasmagoria” seems to be external as she/he observes history expand: “The gallery stretched far away to a point where light almost failed. It was as a tunnel bored deep into the past”(Woolf 2016:227).

Indeed, for Orlando, queer historiography is a precarious thing to practice since straight time and chrononormativity is a constant presence looming over as we approach the end of the narration:

Like thunder, the stable clock struck four. Never did any earthquake so demolish a whole town. The gallery and all its occupants fell to powder. Her own face, that had been dark and sombre as she gazed, was lit as by an explosion of gunpowder. In this same light everything near her showed with extreme distinctness. [...] Yet, she kept, as she had not done when the clock struck ten in London, complete composure (for she was one and entire, and presented, it may be, larger surface to the shock of time). (Woolf 2016:228)

These elegantly images are laid to contrast with Orlando’s attempts to remember, moments in which there is stillness, time seems to be as it was, and curiously it then when Orlando is contemplating “phantoms”:

All was still now. It was near midnight. The moon rose slowly over the weald. Its light raised a phantom castle upon earth. There stood the great house with all its windows robed in silver. Of wall or substance there was none. All was phantom. All was still. All was lit as for the coming of a dead Queen. Gazing below her, Orlando saw dark plumes tossing in the courtyard, and torches flickering and shadows kneeling. A Queen once more stepped from her chariot. (Woolf 2016:234)

Soon after that time seems to collapse, Woolf manages to describe it masterfully: “It was the eleventh of October. It was 1928. It was the present moment. No one need wonder that Orlando started, pressed her hand to her heart, and turned pale. For what

more terrifying revelation can there be than it is the present moment?" (Woolf 2016:213). Dislocation of time and *hauntology* have in common that, more often than not the subjects of such affections are queer individuals. Normativity creates ghosts, those who have wandered long into the mists of dislocation might find themselves out of time, or at least at odds with it, creating a visible dislocation within the grand narrative of history. Orlando is, in a way, a ghost story, as many queer stories are, a dislocation of times, a multiplicity of hauntings of those affectivities Woolf intuitively gave a name in metaphors, half seriously, half in jest.

Orlando is an unburied, undying ghost, a fiction that contains reality, made of several bodies of text and possibly several souls as well. It is a text made of texts, including an important part of Orlando's assemblage identity which is her/his poem *the Oak Tree*:

Ultimately, she decides to not bury the text and the novel closes with Orlando and "The Oak Tree" in much the same position: unburied and non-dying. She wants to bury her past writing and realizes she cannot, just as she cannot bury her past selves as she realizes in this moment [...] affirming that the work is not only a glimpse of how expectations time and history are queered through its failures to conform, but also that the work acts as mimesis for Orlando's identity and self, another mode through which the conditions of the transgenre become materialized. (Wingenroth 2019:45)

Orlando acknowledges then, the different components that make his/her identity, the many affectivities such as writing from an androgynous point of view (*the Oak Tree*) objects and places (The house) even the accumulation of her own multiplicity. His/her own past selves. In a way, she/he realises that the only way to live historically present is to continue to be haunted. To continue to live through the centuries through those who read her/his work.

Orlando: A Biography ends with a timeline that extends beyond the text itself, a life that persists beyond the normative biographical framing. Approximately three hundred years have passed in total since the novel began with Orlando as a young boy, and those years do not come to a close with the last page. Moffat's argument that the dismantling of normative assumptions of temporality and the resistance to conformity to a traditional narrative framework that are central to understandings of queer time are particularly evident in the expansive life of Orlando that continues on after Woolf wrote the last sentences. (Wingenroth 2019:33-4)

As established before, *Orlando: A Biography* acts as transgenre text, a piece of writing made of many parts, as many as Orlando's gender identity assemblage. The biography is extended, time continues once the text ends, history is something still being written and Orlando's internal monologue is only interrupted again by the ominous clock: "And

the twelfth stroke of midnight sounded; the twelfth stroke of midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty Eight” (Woolf 2016:235).

Woolf’s remarkable choice of ending the narration in the present time—while it was being written—completely discards the notions of finitude present in the genres that she employs in her text, effectively becoming something else. The narration ends with Orlando alive, potentially surviving her/his own husband. Nothing is said about their children, it is open to speculation as many other threads of the narration. It is, then, despite the stroke of the imposed time it is a concession to comment on how the perception of straight time is, with the acceleration of it, each time more pressing on the individual but it is not the end of Orlando’s queer temporality.

4. Conclusions and further research

In order to add to the discussion around Woolf’s *Orlando: A Biography* as an established queer work, I first aimed to unravel the connection between Orlando’s gender identity and time and history, a subject which was first pointed out by Caughie (2013) and Beers (2020). To do so I aimed to add to the current discussion answering several questions that have been proposed in the thesis statement. I have approached these matters using poststructuralist analysis as well as several postulates from the area of queer studies influenced by the theory of affects, such as queer temporalities or assemblage theory.

Firstly, I argued that *Orlando: A Biography* is not only an example of queer life writing but following Caughie’s thesis, it can be interpreted in its structure as a transgenre text that bends itself to accommodate several genres, the narrative serving the queer character that it is presented to us. After analysing the complexities of cataloguing Orlando inside just a single genre I decided to turn to the ideas of an androgynous mind with which Woolf’s worked to create Orlando’s identity, to see if Woolf’s intuitive ideas about text and identity were compatible with the modern understanding of the formation of a nonbinary identity by using the tool of assemblage theory as adapted by Sebastian Cordoba (2020). Followingly, I identified one of the axes that contribute to such formation of an identity in relation to two concepts which are queer temporalities as conceived by Jack Halberstam and Freeman’s theories of a straight time and a queer temporalities. Since Orlando is a work in which the identity of

the character is continuously fluctuating and interacting with the omnipresent theme of time that permeates the entire narrative.

This particular line of reception of *Orlando*, not only highlights the need of a trans reading, but also shows that the only way to read such a complex work is interpreting it as a transgenre, a mixture of genres in which to accommodate the own character and his identity on which the narrative focuses. The very exterior of the narrative is forcibly moulded by its protagonist.

Returning to Caughie (2013), I also follow her line of discussion since the academic was the first one to point out the relation of Orlando's identity as queer individual and history. I defended that by traversing history, Orlando becomes both a subject of queering history through his presence as well as practicing queer historiography through the narration, by virtue of his undying condition.

Admittedly, it has not been within the scope of this study to describe all intertextual links of material history and the queer historiography in *Orlando*, a concept that could be explored, perhaps, in subsequent works. Moreover, there are still many open threads that the limitations of these thesis could not address, such as a detailed inventory of all the different interactions inside Orlando's assemblage.

Unfortunately, it has not been within the limit of this work to compare the different cinematic *Orlando*'s adaptations, which would have been an interesting exercise. In all honesty, there has only been suggested the possibility of depicting a chronology between *Orlando* and other figures of undying queers inspired by him/her. It might be of interest for other academics—or to open new lines of investigation—to address this suggestion in the future.

As stated in the introduction, *Orlando*'s conjunction of his/her fluid identity with time and history—which lays at the heart of the text—has been not only of my interest but at the interests of many trans individuals who have read *Orlando* as their biography as a portrait of a communal emotional intensity. At the same time, I reiterate that *Orlando* is a figure of an undying queer that resists defeated narratives of anti-futurity and malignant tropes, such as the 'bury your gays' trope, and has become a source of cultural hope, a rarity even in today's prose, a positive depiction of queerness.

Woolf's trans narrative perseveres in its relevance to the current cultural discussions of how we interact with literature in regards to cultural controversies. *Orlando: A Biography* remains a mirror to which all gender variants, genderqueer and

transgender individuals—both binary and nonbinary—can use to understand themselves since it showcases (explicitly even sometimes, though admittedly some other between lines) a queer individual inscribed in time and history. *Orlando* presents a queer temporality successfully lived, an example of what the intelligible looks like in the face of imposed straight time and imposed cisgender heterosexual normativity. *Orlando* is still relevant to modern conversations of gender identity, the challenges it presents in strict binary narratives both in fiction and in lived life.

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