Becomings in *Orlando*: Temporality, Writing and Queerness

Orlando Romanında Oluşumlar: Zamansallık, Yazarlık ve Kuir Olmak

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the relation between the notion of queerness, becoming, and the act of writing in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928). I am employing "becoming" here as an umbrella term to show the relation between queerness and time, and the various mechanisms that are at work in the act of writing by and about women. Queerness and becoming signify a non-monolithic understanding of sexuality, and both terms disrupt the heteronormative norms built around sexual dichotomies, raising awareness of the potentiality of one's transformative capabilities. Queerness as a mode of becoming and in its capacity to destabilize established norms of gender duality is closely tied to temporality since it distorts the linear understanding of time as well. The perception of time is paramount in understanding one's existence, both as a writer and as a woman, especially in the last part of Woolf's novel. This is the moment of modernity in the present, with all its multiplicity, which the writer aspires to capture in order to be the writer of her time. The entire novel is marked by the protagonist, Orlando's effort to complete and become the writer of her manuscript. As Orlando "becomes woman" in the Deleuzian sense, she also becomes the writer of her incomplete text, "The Oak Tree." I argue that only in her queerness, and thus in her uneven relationship with time, does Orlando manage to become a writer and, ironically, become timely.
Keywords: Woolf, *Orlando*, queer, writing, becoming, temporality.

Öz
Bu makale, Virginia Woolf'un *Orlando: Bir Yaşam Öyküsü* (1928) eserindeki kuirlik, oluş hali ve yazma eylemi arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanmaktadır. Burada kullanılan "oluş" kavramı, kadınlar tarafından ve kadınlar üzerine yazma eyleminde işlev gören çeşitli mekanizmalarla beraber kuirlik ve zaman arasındaki ilişkiyi göstermek için kullanılmaktadır. Kuirlik ve oluş, monolitik olmayan bir cinsiyet anlayışına işaret eder ve her iki kavram da cinsiyet ikilikleri etrafında inşa edilmiş heteronormatif normları bozarak, bireyin dönüştürücü kabiliyetlerindeki potansiyele dikkat çeker. Kuirlik, bir "oluş" biçimi olarak cinsiyet ikiliği etrafında kurulmuş olan sabit normları bozma kapasitesiyle, zamanla yakından ilintilidir, çünkü kuirlik çizgisel zaman anlayışını da bozar. Zaman algısı, Woolf'un romanının özellikle son bölümünde bir yazar ve bir kadın olarak kişinin varoluşunu anlaması açısından son derece önemlidir. Bu, yazarın çağının yazarı olmak amacıyla yakalamak istediği, içinde çeşitlilik barındıran şimdiki zamanın modernite ânıdır. Romanın tamamına, ana karakter Orlando'nun kendisinin yazmakta olduğu metni tamamlama ve yazarı olmaya yönelik çabası nüfuz etmektedir. Orlando, Deleuze'ün işaret ettiği anlamda "kadın-olurken," aynı zamanda, yazmakta olduğu "The Oak Tree" metninin de yazarı haline gelir. Böylelikle, bu çalışmada savunulduğu gibi, Orlando yalnız kuirliği, başka bir deyişle, zamanla olan eşitsiz ilişkisi sayesinde yazma

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eylemini başararak bir yazar olabilir ve ironik bir biçimde, içinde bulunduğu zamanı yakalar.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Woolf, kuir, *Orlando*, yazmak, oluşum, zamansallık

Orlando: A Biography (1928) by Virginia Woolf presents us with one of the most unique figures of a queer character in literary history. Not only because Orlando was born as a nobleman in Queen Elizabethan England and later became a woman in Constantinople during his ambassadorship, thus manifesting one of the most extraordinary transformations in literary history, but also because he lived for more than 300 years, he queers time and all the expectations of heteronormative norms. The magical queer transformation does not end there. After Orlando returns to England as a beautiful woman, she spends many years dressing both as a man and as a woman, enjoying both experiences equally. Orlando's transformation thus appears to dominate the entire novel. However, there is another major theme in the novel that can be traced alongside the theme of sexual transformation. The full title of the novel, *Orlando: A Biography*, gestures toward this writing experience that instantly compels the reader to reflect on the genre of biography and what it is supposed to entail. Orlando, the novel's protagonist, is introduced as a 16-year-old young boy who aspires to be a poet himself. Writing seems to be a favorite pastime for this wealthy dilettante, as is apparent in the following, somehow sarcastic sentence: "Thus had been written, before he was twenty-five, some forty-seven plays, histories, romances, poems, some in prose, some in verse; some in French, some in Italian; all romantic, and all along" (1928: 36-37). Orlando writes under an oak tree, and the oak tree, a symbol of strength and endurance, becomes the title of Orlando's lengthy poem, the most precious entity for her[1] that will remain in her bosom for the rest of her life. The poem will be written and rewritten by Orlando till the end of the novel, mapping the quest to find her literary talent and her personal growth.

The novel is therefore an enactment of the genre *künstlerroman*,[2] tracing Orlando's becoming a writer. Through Orlando's becoming a woman and a writer, the space of the novel opens up new possibilities, and it is in this opening that Orlando can move freely and the novel can come into being. As Orlando finishes her poem at the end of the novel, the biography of Orlando is being completed by Woolf herself. Aside from this metafictional aspect, Woolf presents the reader with many instances of writing practices by referring to famous names and the history of English literature. Orlando's adventure with the poet Nick Greene is a satirical allusion to such a chronological literary history. Longing to become a famous

[1] Inasmuch attention I paid to the use of pronouns he/she, her/his, considering the before and after Orlando's sexual transformation, however as in the case of Orlando's ambiguous sexuality since the beginning of the novel, it is not always easy to discern these pronouns. But this confusion in itself may address the indistinct borders of sexuality.

[2] *Künstlerroman* is a term which refers to a type of novel that focuses on the artistic development and creative journey of its protagonist. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce would be a good example of the genre depicting the intellectual and artistic growth of the main character.

writer, Orlando invites Nick Greene, a poverty-stricken versifier, to stay in his country home in order to get feedback about his work. Instead, Nick Greene writes a scornful and sarcastic poem about Orlando. Frustrated, Orlando accepts the ambassadorship to Constantinople. After his adventurous stay in Constantinople and then with the gypsies in Bursa, she returns to England as a woman, where she socializes with the intellectual London society in the age of Addison, Dryden, and Pope. Somewhere during her unusually long life in the 19th century, and after her husband, Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine leaves the same day for Cape Horn, Orlando finishes her poem "The Oak Tree". By 1928, she has returned to London, where she is reunited with her friend Greene, now a famous literary critic of the Victorian era, who offers to find a publisher for the poem she has been writing throughout the novel, "The Oak Tree." The manuscript culminates into a full poem by the end of the novel.

Orlando's breaking the boundaries of sexuality by becoming a woman, or at times both man and woman, has close affinity with her becoming a writer. For that account, it is noteworthy to refer to Deleuze and Guattari's thoughts on writing and becoming, more specifically becoming-woman. Deleuze, in his article "Literature and Life" implies a rhizomatic aspect of writing and explains why writing is about "becoming-woman." He states:

> Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived. Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal, or -vegetable, becomes-molecule, to the point of becoming-imperceptible […] Becoming does not move in the other direction, and one does not become Man, insofar as man presents himself as a dominant form of expression that claims to impose itself on all matter, whereas woman, animal or molecule always has a component of flight that escapes its own formalization. (1997: 225)

According to Deleuze, then, becoming a woman is not a physical transformation into a woman or an attempt to see the world from a woman's perspective. Becoming-woman is a state of being that is not even inherently attached to women; as Deleuze states, "[e]ven when it is a woman who is becoming, she has to become-woman" (1997: 225). As the zone she enters is still beyond her existence, it addresses what she is not. In its capacity to denounce the dominance of the normative heterogeneity of "Man," becoming-woman is an act of minoritizing, deterritorializing the majority. Becoming-woman is transformative, rhizomatic, plural, and interwoven. Claire Colebrook, in her essay, "Queer Aesthetics," points to this relation of absence-presence and states that, for Deleuze and Guattari, "there are styles of becoming, such that any becoming-woman will both encounter something other than itself and rewrite just what that "other" (or woman) is" (2011: 29). Colebrook argues that becoming may turn out to be normative as well as present itself as "self-evident good" only to be framed and limited by our constitutive power, impelling ourselves into self-normativizing (2011: 31).

However, Deleuze's concept of becoming-woman does not "realize and actualize itself, does not flourish into presence, but bears a capacity to annihilate itself, to refuse its ownness in order to attach, transversally, to becomings whose trajectories are external and unmasterable" (2011: 31). Therefore, it is not normative and masterable; it promises something other than itself. Thus, becoming for Deleuze is not predetermined; it takes many deaths to be reborn in various styles of becoming-woman; one becomes woman at the expense of annihilating one's selfhood to become woman. It is worth examining how writing enabled Orlando, or Woolf, for that matter, to encounter something other than herself and its relation to queerness. Could this potentiality in becoming-woman have been used by Woolf in order to fight the heteronormative understanding that dominated the literary scene of her time? Since the novel also has many implications as to the struggles of women writers, could we conclude that only through queer writing can a woman writer come into existence? Is the verb queering the same as the notion of becoming? In order to tackle these questions, I will first investigate the relation between becoming and the notion of queerness, and then, looking at the practices of writing in the novel, I will demonstrate the ways in which the writing experience intersects both with becoming and queering.

The relation between becoming and the notion of queerness may seem obvious to the reader, as both notions indicate a process instead of a closure, open-ended possibilities instead of complying with the norms. Simone de Beauvoir, as early as 1949, in her *The Second Sex,* drew attention to the relation between becoming and queerness with her memorable manifesto, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes a woman" (1949: 3). With this succinct but powerful statement, Beauvoir points out the fact that gender is a construct but it is also an ongoing process and that the woman is not a fixed, stable category. Beauvoir pointed out that it is in this becoming that one should search for her capabilities, which may be expressed at different stages of her life:

> The human species is forever in a state of change, forever becoming ... [Thus, w]oman is not a completed reality, but rather a becoming, and it is in her becoming that ... her possibilities should be defined. What gives rise to much of the debate is the tendency to reduce her to what she has been, to what she is today, in raising the question of her capabilities; for the fact is that capabilities are clearly manifested only when they have been realized-but the fact is also that when we have to do with a being whose nature is [endless self-overcoming], we can never close the books. (1949: 33-34)

Acknowledging that one is always in the process of becoming as such encourages one to search for one's capabilities, but it also highlights the need to deconstruct established heteronormative categories attached to gender and sexuality, a point of view that gender and queer studies have been building upon ever since.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is one of the prominent scholars of queer studies who elaborated on how becoming and queerness complement each other. In one of her early essays, "Queer and Now," she defines queerness as a multiple, continuous process that cannot be confined within strict boundaries: "the open mesh of

possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (2012: 8). Then it would be possible to imagine sexuality beyond the strict formations of the male /female sexual dichotomies. As Elizabeth Grosz argues in her *Volatile Bodies* this dichotomous thinking is always problematic in itself as it ossifies gender roles, fixes their boundaries, and, as expected, the more privileged term in the duality suppresses the other. She writes:

> Dichotomous thinking necessarily hierarchizes and ranks the two polarized terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart. The subordinated term is merely the negation or denial, the absence or privation of the primary term, its fall from grace; the primary term defines itself by expelling its other and in this process establishes its own boundaries and borders to create an identity for itself. (1994: 3)

The suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart that Grosz mentions would be the quality of otherness attributed to women so that power structures built upon this binary can be consolidated. As a counterclaim, the notion of queerness has been employed to find the ways in which one can envisage female bodies beyond the dualistic understanding of human bodies. Queer as a verb addresses the transformative possibilities of thinking beyond the confines of the strictly formed dualities, and it attempts to deconstruct monolithic and heteronormative categories of gender formation. Not only in relation to sexuality but queering also attests to many other "identity constituting, identity-fracturing discourses that take language, skin, migration, state as their subject matter" (Sedgwick 8). As such, many philosophers and theorists, including Elizabeth Grosz, called for the need to devise "new terms and different conceptual frameworks" to contemplate the body outside the binary pairs (1994: 24).

One possible solution to an alternative mode of thinking against such binarization, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is "to be between, to pass between, the intermezzo" (1987: 277), or, as Grosz mentions, to have a vision of a "both-and relation" (1994: 181). Since one cannot put dualism behind or move on unaffected, according to Grosz the only way to avoid it is to "pass ... through binaries, not in order to reproduce them but to find terms and modes that befuddle their operations, connections that demonstrate the impossibility of their binarization, terms, relations, and practices that link the binarily opposed terms" (1994: 181). Thus, drawing on the fluidity of sexes, the potentiality of their becoming, and their transformative capabilities, one can imagine an alternative concept of female subjectivity, one that exceeds a single female body. The queer mind then operates on many levels; it is provocative, subversive, and perpetually brings in the idea of plurality.

Queerness as a mode of becoming and in its capacity to destabilize established norms of gender duality is closely tied to temporality since it distorts the linear understanding of time, as one can see in the etymology of the term, as noted by

Sedgwick in *Tendencies*, as "a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, troublant" (1994: xii). Sedgwick writes to denote the fluidity the word suggests, and she continues: "The word "queer" itself means across – it comes from the Indo-European root -twerkw, which also yields the german quer (transverse), Latin torquere (to twist), English athwart" (1994: xii). Queerness indeed troubles the stream of historical time and disrupts heteronormative norms, including straight time. As José Esteban Muñoz mentions, "[q]ueerness's time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time. Straight time is a self-naturalizing temporality. Straight time's 'presentness' needs to be phenomenologically questioned" (2009: 25).

Queer transformation lies in the heart of *Orlando* because of the magical realist sexual metamorphoses Orlando goes through in Constantinople. The choice of the city, modern Istanbul, of all places where this metamorphosis takes place is meaningful and connotes blurry borders; hence, Istanbul is usually understood to be a city between the East and the West. Orlando, in her particular experience of being a man, then a woman, then at times both, also blurs the borders of gender identity and manages to get out of the monolithic subjectivity. By doing so, Orlando, as Deleuze and Guattari remark, operates "by blocks, blocks of ages, blocks of epochs, blocks of kingdoms of nature, blocks of sexes, forming so many becomings between things, or so many lines of deterritorialization" (1987: 294). Thus, being a man or woman does not address binarily opposed terms in the literary space of the novel, as Orlando's sexuality remains always disputable. Woolf, in the novel, speaks of practices of deterritorialization and the fluidity of sexes as a natural phenomenon, as noted in the following passage: "For here again, we come to a dilemma. Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being, a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above" (1928: 92-93).

It is not only Orlando's becomings that is at stake in the novel. As Pooja Mittal Biswas mentions, queer time appears to be "seductive" in the novel (2020: 55). Sasha attracts Orlando with her androgynous looks. Orlando's failed attempt to unite with Sasha at the beginning might be read as a foreshadowing of discovering his new potential with the chiming of clocks that both signify the end of straight time for Orlando (2020: 48–49). On the other hand, as Biswas mentions, Orlando draws Archduke Harry into queer time (2020: 55). The Archduke desires Orlando, whether as a man or a woman, so much so that he dressed up as a woman to win his heart. And Orlando feels at ease with transgender practices. She gets dressed up as a man, sometimes a woman, and she admits that nothing has changed after his transformation and that she is the same person:

> Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure […] Orlando had become a woman there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity […] The change seemed to have been

> accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando showed no surprise at it. (1928: 67-68)

As this passage implies, Orlando does not severely feel the pains of transformation from one sex to another. For instance, Orlando's established life resumes after she comes back from Constantinople; she does not receive any reaction from her servants. She loses part of her financial rights for a while but regains them in the end. Sexually, she is as attractive as before. Derek Ryan also argues in *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory* that there is no "essential difference in identity" after Orlando's sexual metamorphoses (2013: 103). However, quoting Vita-Sackville West's letter, which denounces Woolf's conventional turn at the end of the novel in making Orlando get married and have a child, Ryan makes the point that "it is precisely and paradoxically through Orlando's marriage that Woolf points towards a subversion of heteronormative frameworks of sexuality" (2013: 109). Orlando's relationship with her husband Shelmerdine shows many aspects of queering sexuality in the context of marriage. If dichotomous thinking hierarchizes, suppresses, and subordinates its negative counterpart, as Elizabeth Grosz notes, we can claim that, with its transformative capabilities, Orlando and Shelmerdine present the reader beyond a dualistic understanding of sexual formations. The following short dialogue is an affirmative of it: "Are you positive you aren't a man? Shelmerdine would ask anxiously and Orlando would echo, "Can it be possible you're not a woman?" (1928: 127) In such a fluid relationship, Orlando's and Shelmerdine's mutual language exceeds or deviates from the normative ways of communicating and language. Orlando sends a telegram to Shelmerdine after seeing her old friend Nick Greene in the city that reads: "Life literature Greene toady" and adds "Rattigan Glumphoboo" (1928: 139). A sentence that is devised in such a way that only they can understand it but one that would be senseless in standard, accepted English. Likewise, she names him Shel, Mar, or Bonthrop, which all suggest different connotations in different contexts, reflecting different facets of his identity.

Becoming and *queering* go hand in hand and complement each other, as I pointed out in my analysis so far. Nietzsche, however, associates becoming with historical time and the mainstream and argues that it is important not to get caught by it. Promoting queerness in a defiant mode, Nietzsche asserts that "the time will come, when one will prudently refrain from all constructions of the World-process or even of the history of man; a time when one will regard not the masses but individuals, who form a kind of bridge across the turbulent stream of becoming" (1997: 111). Resonating with Walter Benjamin's notion of historical time, if becoming is circumscribed by historical events, which "keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" (1968: 257), then it is only through queering, a form of untimeliness," that one can go beyond heteronormative modes of being and against developmental time. The sexual transformation Orlando goes through in the middle of the novel by becoming a woman also marks a split with the personal evolutionary history in the Nietzschean sense; it is not progressive, it is not in tune with the socially shared temporal phases, wherein one is expected to grow up, settle down, start a family, and get old. Orlando, in other words, represents the

queer moment, which is marked by a form of untimeliness, not only because Woolf presents her as a polymorphous identity who gets to live more than an expected life span and that she switched sexes but also because her temporal experience does not follow a heteronormative path: she lives many selves contemporaneously, and the narrative of the novel presents many instances in which we understand that the concept of time does not follow a linear mode based on Cronos. In line with that, instead of the Western progressive time, Woolf follows a magical realist pattern and employs the great frost or later the prolonged damp that casts over England to give a sense of time that regulates the rhythm of life, including the cycle of fertility, as when the century changes overnight and modernity makes itself felt in the urban setting with the trams, cars, and hustle and bustle of the city.

It is at this point, at the juncture of modern temporality, which is briefly described as the "spirit of the age," that Orlando finally feels at home. In the last part of the novel, the striking clocks pin her down to the actual, official moment as the narrator notes the precise date: "And the twelfth stroke of midnight sounded; the twelfth stroke of midnight. Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen hundred and Twenty Eight." (1928: 162) As the images of the past and the present overlap in the last scene, we see Shelmerdine, now a captain, leaping to the ground from an overhead airplane, the dead Queen stepping from her chariot, and an aeroplane standing over Orlando's head. Woolf describes the temporal change with the term "spirit of the age," which also summarizes the mode and the change in Orlando herself. Orlando strongly feels one with this expanded moment. She stands under the great oak and remembers her centuries of adventure.

The desire to keep up with the time of modernity, which in a sense determines where Orlando stands in the scale of progress and linearity, seems to be at odds with queer existence and straight time. If queerness attests to a form of untimeliness, how does Orlando's queerness fit with her desire and insistence to be in tune with her time? The spirit of the age definitely suggests a mode where one can feel the moment in its most exact presentness. However, this present is not a temporal phase in the developmental, linear time of the novel. It does not refer to a time that can be measured but can only be perceived intuitively. Thus, it brings to mind the French philosopher Henri Bergson's subjective and intuitive time that one lives not on the clock, but one that is based on duration. Bergson introduces the term *durée*, attesting to an expanded present, which he defines as the "continuous progress of the past that gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances" (2002: 173). As such, Orlando finds herself in an expanded present, where she sees the past, the present, and even the future at the same time. The traffic in Oxford Street collides with the images of the past, and she remembers the bare mountains in Turkey. The narrator makes a point about the ways in which different people can experience time and various forms of existence that continuously pass the borders of natural life spans to dwell in such an expanded present:

> And indeed, it cannot be denied that the most successful practitioners of the art of life, often unknown people by the way, somehow contrive to

> synchronize the sixty or seventy different times that beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison, and the present is neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten in the past. Of them, we can justly say that they live precisely the sixty-eight or seventy-two years allotted to 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. (1928: 151)

I have mentioned that queerness has always been marked by its untimely relation to socially shared temporal phases, constant breaking of habits, and constant deaths to be reborn. As the above quote implies, queerness addresses untimeliness; it is a way of becoming, but not through the linear time of Cronos. Yet, Orlando, in the process of becoming a writer, has an issue with being on time! She desires to feel one with the present moment and wants to catch the spirit of the age, which one may befittingly call modernity. She feels this urge soon after delivering her son. First, she notices the immense change in lifestyle, and in a magical realist fashion, she talks about how everything seems to have shrunk and that women have been growing narrow lately as she concentrates on what this age means to her. "There was something definite and distinct about the age" (1928: 147) as she notices the modern experience everywhere around her. The clock chimes and she notes the exact date: "It was 1928. It was the present moment" (1928: 147). She is fascinated and at the same time terrified by the feeling it invokes in her: "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 that it is the present moment?" (1928: 147) As she jumps into her motor-car, Orlando searches for an understanding of human temporality (historicity) in the present, and like a flaneur, in the everydayness itself. For instance, she finds it invigorating to be there in the midst of everydayness: This present moment is marked by sensations, ephemeral, spontaneous, fragmented and transitory images of the urban landscape:

> The Old Kent Road was very crowded on Thursday, the eleventh of October 1928. People spilt off the pavement. There were women with shopping bags. Children ran out. There were sales at drapers' shops. Streets widened and narrowed. Long vistas steadily shrunk together. Here was a market. Here was a funeral. Here a procession with banners upon which was written 'Ra-Un', but what else? Meat was very red. Butchers stood at the door. Women almost had their heels sliced off, etc. (1928: 151)

The flaneur's observances of modern experience and the perception of time in the midst of modern urban life would reminisce the reader of Woolf's novel, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and its protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway who also manages to merge the temporality of her private world with that of the public world, and has the gift of gliding between these two realms without any effort. A description that comes to the fore in the novel, *Mrs Dalloway* exemplifies this quality. Woolf describes Clarissa Dalloway as a woman who has "the gift to be; to exist; to sum it all up in

the moment" (1925: 147), in order to emphasize her ability to easily create a temporal continuum between different temporal phases. It is as if Woolf wants the reader to realize that existence itself, the ability to endure, and to situate oneself in the world requires an ability that Clarissa Dalloway perfectly displays by summing up the past and the future in the present. In a similar fashion, awareness of time is integral to Orlando's understanding of existing in the world. She is the literary embodiment of such temporality: she is capable of living in two temporalities at once—she brings the past into the present while she experiences the present fully. While, the images of the past, such as mountains of Turkey, Rustum the gypsy, Queen Elizabeth surge into the present in the last chapter, she experiences an expanded present, a conception of time that can be aligned with Henri Bergson's duration (*durée*) which renders the cosmos and the material world as part of a duration.

Bergson elaborates on the connection between the temporal present and bodily existence in cosmos by emphasizing that what one understands of the present consists of the consciousness one has of her body (2002: 127). The body extends in space, experiences sensations, performs movements and becomes therefore the "centre of action" and the "actual state of my becoming, that part of my duration which is in process of growth" (2002: 128). This can be read as an attempt to differentiate between time and space in a human's perception of her own existence in relation to the flowing mass of the material world, which is in a continuous becoming. Within the given cosmos, a person's state of "becoming" suggests a continuing process of "what is being made;" hence "the movement must be linked with the sensation, must prolong it in action" (2002: 127). Bergson concludes that one's consciousness of the present is "already memory" since the person perceives her immediate past in every present moment. Therefore, the person becomes a component of universal becoming; a part of her representation is "ever being born again, the part always present, or rather that which, at each moment, is just past" (2002: 131). The body, being an image that persists amongst other images, constitutes at every moment, "a section of the universal becoming," and therefore becomes a connecting link (2002: 131-132). Orlando, thinking that "now she performed in spirit" of her time, that is, she feels part of the universal becoming and the cosmos, her body feels like an image amongst other images and is connected to the flowing mass of the flowing world. She states that she feels extremely happy, because "she need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself. Now, therefore, she could write, and write she did. She wrote. She wrote. She wrote" (1928: 131). Now that Orlando feels she caught the spirit of the age and feel at home with it, she can be transformed into a writer. One might say that growing aware of the potentialities "becoming" might encapsulate in a Beauvoirian sense, enables Orlando to write and finally complete her poem.

It is at this point, we need to look at Orlando's writing endeavor more closely and Woolf's act of writing the novel itself to see how various twists and deviations in the space of the novel comply with the transformative power of becoming. The act of writing takes place on two levels in *Orlando*. On the one hand, we witness Virginia Woolf's writing experience and on the other hand, we witness Orlando

becoming a writer of her manuscript, "The Oak Tree." The novel is presented to the reader as a biography, as the full title, *Orlando: A Biography*, suggests, but we understand soon that it is actually a mock-biography. A biography is expected to rest on real events and be based on a true story of a person. The novel, from the beginning then, by claiming to write a biography of a fictional character gestures towards the fictionality of any text, even the ones that claim to be biographies. On the other hand, as Woolf scholars rightfully put, the novel serves as a platform on which Woolf explores the ways in which censorship of her time could be avoided and at the same time criticized by the author. Woolf clearly mocks the literary circles by displaying the patriarchal attitudes towards women writers of the time. The well-known fact that the novel was dedicated to Woolf's close friend and lover Vita Sackville-West who served as the model for the hero of Orlando justifies the biographical aspect of the novel but Woolf's ironical and playful tone and approach, by adding fantastic elements such as the great frost, Orlando's unusual life span renders the novel inscrutable and thus enables her to escape heavy censorship of her time. In line with such a gesture to escape the imposed norms, the novel also unwrites itself as many instances in the narrative show. The genre of biography is undermined and rendered obsolete, for example, during Orlando's stay in Constantinople, where the narrator remarks that the records that could have informed us about Orlando's career as an ambassador were all burnt at a fire and that "often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise and even to use the imagination" (1928: 58).

The writing of Orlando's manuscript, "The Oak Tree" as well shows that the text is a sketch, a journey which lay out the history of her becoming woman and becoming a writer at the same time in Deleuzian sense. However, it also does not follow a regular pattern or timeliness. The poem is written and undermined at the same time. For instance, Orlando admits that "as he scratched out as many lines as he wrote in, the sum of them was often, at the end of the year, rather less than at the beginning, and it looked as if in the process of writing, the poem would be completely unwritten" (1928: 54). Often times, Orlando goes through a writerly phase that reminds the reader of Mallarme's "Crisis of the Verse" for the reason that, according to Orlando, the grass might be green and the sky blue, but somehow the signifier does not match the signified. She starts the poem all over from the beginning; she is never content with the shape it takes. Finally, from the youth who tries to copy nature in his writings in a mimetic way, Orlando comes all the way along to an understanding of a modernist vision of art such as that of Baudelaire's Monsieur G, the painter of modern life who manages to capture the present in its transitory and timeless mode. In short, the manuscript becomes a sketch of some sort, a testament to her growth as a writer. "The Oak Tree" poem that marks her temporal existence and her writerly existence and that situates her in the historical present is being completed at the end of the novel. As the reader witnesses the development of this lengthy poem throughout the novel, Orlando also makes a discovery about her temporal existence and how literature is related to this temporal existence. In other words, while the poem is being written, Orlando also evolves into many selves, crosses over, and experiences both sexes, and in this

polymorphous state, she situates herself in time and history. In writing, the quest becomes the quest to feel at home with her queer existence. As such, Virginia Woolf makes a strong point as to how the potentiality of transformation in becoming is necessary in becoming a writer and that the notion of a woman with all her transformative capabilities can be imagined within the scope of this queer perspective. She seems to be implying that only then, that is, by being untimely, getting out of the heteronormative historical time of the society, can one actually be the writer of her time.

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