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# Virginia Woolf: The Outer and the Inner

MA Major Thesis

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# Contents

# 1. Introduction

In my MA Thesis I concentrate on the following works of Virginia Woolf: *Orlando: A Biography*, *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of The Years* and *The Years*. The novel *Orlando* is included into this selection because it has certain similarities with *The Pargiters* and *The Years*. *The Pargiters*, a novel-essay, is an interesting experiment in the form as it alternates didactic and fictional chapters.

In the second chapter, entitled "The Issue of the Form," I focus on the meaning of the form for the expression of various aspects of reality. The third chapter, "*Orlando*, the Precursor of *The Years*," discusses some links between *Orlando* and *The Years* and explains the subtitle "A Biography." The fourth chapter, called "*Orlando: A Biography*," is divided into three subchapters. The subchapter 4.1, "The Portrait and Its Model," is rooted in the biographic material of Vita Sackville-West, and uses it to explain certain similarities between the fictional character of Orlando and his/her model. The subchapter 4.2, "*Orlando*, Time as a Qualitative Aspect of Reality," deals with the psychological concept of time as an aspect of reality. The subchapter 4.3, "*Orlando*, The Search for the Real Self and the Shaping of Poetic Vision," discusses Orlando's search for his/her identity and his/her development as a poet. The fifth chapter, "*The Pargiters*: An Experiment with a Novel-Essay" provides insights into Woolf's critical and creative thinking by comparing the fictional specimens with their immediate analysis and interpretation. The sixth chapter, "*The Years*: The Problem of Combining Fact and Vision," shows the difficulty of expressing the outer and the inner, the different strata of being and the rendering of the sense of the passage of time by means of repetition of thoughts, actions and objects. The seventh chapter, "*The Years*: The Aspect of Vision in

the Search for Pattern," outlines an environment where vision and pattern survive and the efforts of characters to search for them in the fragmentary world.

In my MA Thesis I have attempted to find some of the main common aspects of human search for life, pattern, wholeness and unity, which Woolf conveyed in the novels *Orlando* and *The Years*.

## 2. The Issue of the Form

The novels Virginia Woolf wrote using the idiosyncratic impressionist technique of stream-of-consciousness; *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and *Between the Acts* are undoubtedly great works and a significant contribution to modernist literature, not only in the British but also in a worldwide context. Their originality is the result of the author's incessant search for new form, new ways of expressing the sense of the experience of living. From the publication of *Jacob's Room* (1922), when Woolf found out "how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice" (*AWD* 47), she did not give up this search during her creative lifetime.

After her experiments with the techniques of stream-of-consciousness in short stories and *Jacob's Room*, she articulated her artistic intention in her famous essays "Modern Fiction" (1923) and "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1924). In these essays she expressed her decision not to write in the manner of Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy, whom she described as 'materialists' because "they write of unimportant things" and "spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear

the true and the enduring" (*The Common Reader, No. 1* 187).[1] For Woolf, to grasp life with its bipolarity of permanence and transience, meant to search for the modes of expression, which would enable her "to embrace the unknown and uncircumscribed spirit of the life by writing a novel that steadfastly avoids much of the prosaic connective tissue necessary to narrative fiction" (Rosenthal 44). Woolf finds this spiritual dimension of life everywhere around her, in the ordinary day-to-day life which contains so much that is surprising, unpredictable and uncertain, which might even evoke feelings of fear of transience or loneliness. She places narrative consciousness[2] into her characters, which reflect just these aspects of reality which are so difficult to convey. She describes her vision of reality, or a consciousness of what she calls "reality", by the following words: "a thing I see before me; something abstract; but residing in the downs or sky; beside which nothing matters; in which I shall rest and continue to exist" (*AWD* 132).

For Woolf, the means to express various aspects of reality is the form through which she tries to catch the vital experience of living itself, or rather the sense of the experience of living. It is apparent that we are dealing more with emotional than intellectual communication, the evidence for which lies in the fact that "certain emotions have been placed in the right relations to each other; then [...] the novelist is able to dispose these emotions and make them tell by methods which he inherits" (*The Moment and Other Essays* 134).[3] Every new novel of Virginia Woolf is the result of a

[1] See the essay "Modern Fiction" in *The Common Reader, No. 1.* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1945).

[2] For an illuminating discussion of the 'narrative consciousness', see Howard Harper, *Between Language and Silence. The Novels of Virginia Woolf.* (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 2. Here he explains the term 'narrative consciousness' as referring "not to the author's 'real' personality, but to the particular persona, or aspect of that personality, that creates this particular work of art." He argues that "this persona may express qualities – such as power and control, for example – which cannot find expression in the 'real' personality." According to him the 'narrative consciousness' acknowledges the dynamic involvement of the creative imagination in its story. Virginia Woolf's fiction is ultimately about the evolution of this consciousness.

[3] See the essay "On Re-reading Novels" in *The Moment and Other Essays*. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1947).

painstaking search for a new method by which she tries to shape immediate and unsettling ideas, feelings of the isolation and fragmentation of the world. It is an incessant process in which Woolf does not hesitate to break a previously successful form and go out on a precarious limb of a new experiment.

Most critics share the opinion that Woolf achieved the greatest mastery using such a form for a novel the timespan of which does not exceed 24 hours. Within this period the events of the novels *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and *Between the Acts* unfold, either metaphorically or actually, and in these novels the author's creative imagination reached its most profound expression. The novels *Orlando* or *The Years*, which fundamentally exceeded this time limit, were considered by many critics as works that stray from the mainstream artistic effort of Virginia Woolf. The truth is, however, that despite the unquestionable continuity of thought of Woolf's work as a whole, her individual novels do not follow a linear path, in which the discoveries of every new novel grow out of the ground laid in a previous one, but rather represent "a series of discrete forays in altogether different directions into unknown territory" (Rosenthal 46). In this respect, *The Years* is no less an experimental work than *The Waves.* Moreover, Woolf broke the latter's form intentionally. She notes in her diary: "Here in *Here and Now* [one of the considered titles for *The Years*] I am breaking the mold made by *The Waves*" (*AWD* 220). This development is entirely in keeping with her refusal "to be stamped and stereotyped," and with her belief that it is necessary "to free one's self: to let it find its dimensions, not to be impeded" (*AWD* 213).

In the same way, the novel *Orlando* came into being because of the like need for a sense of freedom and independence. In spite of the fact that Woolf did not try to create a new form, it is not simply an amusing book, as the author originally intended. Not even so frivolous a story as *Orlando* certainly is, full of fantasy, satire and irony, can be

labelled as mere escapism from the serious topics which permeate all her work, in one form or another. The superficial or one-sided judgment of *Orlando* by some critics[4] stems in part from the fact that the author herself did not take this work seriously, at least not in its initial phase, when she describes it in her diary as "an escapade after these serious poetic experimental books whose form is always so closely considered" (*AWD* 105). Guiguet suggests that Leonard Woolf took *Orlando* perhaps even more seriously than the author herself.[5] After the book's completion Virginia Woolf talks about *Orlando* as "a very quick brilliant book" (*AWD* 136), but she adds that she did not try to explore anything new and did not go to such depths as in *To the Lighthouse*. However, "a refusal to go deep [...] is not the same thing as a rejection of depth" (Guiguet 262). To go deep, for Woolf, means to search for such a form of expression which merges with substance into a single whole. The form conveys the meaning. Such an exploration of depth Woolf has in mind when she later evaluates her *Orlando*. But even this exterior and intentionally caricatured view of the world tries to grasp salient aspects of a fluid and complex reality.

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[4] Lyndall Gordon says that there is a promising plot in *Orlando* but she believes that "it is not one of Virginia Woolf's searching fictions. It is a pageant of social postures, gorgeous clothes, and all the artifice of sex roles played to the hilt and encased in a thick layer of glamour." See Lyndall Gordon, *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 187.
Cf. also Bernard Blackstone and David Daiches, two early commentators of Woolf's work who, despite not having access to *A Writer's Diary*, which was first published a few years later in 1953, quite misunderstood *Orlando*. Blackstone closes his rather superficial evaluation of *Orlando* by saying that it "is rather like breaking a butterfly on a wheel." See Bernard Blackstone, *Virginia Woolf: A Commentary*. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1949), 138. Daiches, similarly to Blackstone, sees *Orlando* as "the most lighthearted of Virginia Woolf's novels." His evaluation of *Orlando* is somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, he praises the book as "an impressive experiment", on the other he finds what are, in his opinion, "some quite serious faults." To name a few: turgid prose in some passages, symbolic statements which overreach themselves and fall into confusion and pretentiousness, lyrical passages which never quite soar to their intended heights etc. For further information see David Daiches, *Virginia Woolf*. (London: Editions Poetry, 1945), 93-8.

[5] Cf. Guiguet 263, where Guiguet quotes a sentence from *A Writer's Diary* (128): "L. takes *Orlando* more seriously than I had expected." In *A Writer's Diary*, Virginia Woolf mentions Leonard's enthusiasm in regard to *Orlando*: "[Leonard] Thinks it in some ways better than The Lighthouse ... He says it is very original." For what Leonard Woolf actually thought of *Orlando* see his autobiography where he groups *Orlando* and *Flush* together as two books which "cannot seriously be compared with her major novels." See Leonard Woolf, *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939.* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1968), 146.

This novel, despite its peculiarities, has a specific meaning for Woolf: "*Orlando* taught me how to write a direct sentence; taught me continuity and narrative and how to keep the realities at bay" (*AWD* 136). *Orlando*, was for Woolf, a valuable experience on her way to her next experiment, the beginning of which was the essay-novel *The Pargiters* and its final realization, the novel *The Years*: "In truth *The Pargiters* is first cousin to *Orlando*, though the cousin is the flesh: *Orlando* taught me the trick of it" (*AWD* 190). *Orlando* contains discussions and deliberations which transcend the scope of the novel, a fact which led Guiguet to express his assertion that the best suited title for it is perhaps "Essay-novel" (cf. Guiguet 262). A great part of these discussions are focused on the nature of sexual identity, and on what it means to be a woman in a society full of prejudice and doubts about the ability of women to think independently, openly express their opinions and create works of art.

The humorous tone which in *Orlando* helps Woolf to address a difficult topic, without depriving it of consequence, is then, in the essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), superseded by a clearly expressed statement founded on facts which, combined with creative imagination, allows this essay to transcend the scope of an ordinary polemic.

*The Years* differs from Woolf's other novels written, in the technique of stream-of-consciousness, in that the purely inner and visionary approach to life is replaced by a combination of fact and vision, forming her own vision from facts of the real world and from a specific social situation. The process of creating this novel from the initially contemplated, and in part realized, novel-essay entitled The Pargiters to its final manifestation *The Years* gives evidence of the difficulty of this task. I have devoted a separate chapter to this topic in this thesis. The result of four years' hard work came to be a novel which grasps the real world inhabited by real people leading their lives in a specific time period of British history. The intention to encompass all four dimensions

which Woolf discovered in human life – I and not I, the outer and the inner – must have necessarily counted on utilizing both critical and creative thinking. Woolf was aware of the fact that these two types of thinking stand in opposition to each other, and that the truth of fact and the truth of the imagination are not easily reconciled.

According to Alice Van Buren Kelley, Woolf's world of fact is the world of physical isolation, confusion and limitation. The world of vision is the spiritual world of unity and pattern. The vision may transcend the limits of objective truth, but it requires the world of fact which enables vision to function and have meaning (cf. Kelley 5).

It is necessary, however, to treat the truth of fact and the truth of imagination very carefully. In her essay "The New Biography" Woolf says: "For though both truths are genuine, they are antagonistic; let them meet and they destroy each other" (*Granite and Rainbow* 154).[6] Such a danger threatened the novel-essay *The Pargiters*. It is likely that for precisely this reason Woolf changed her ambitious but risky intention, so that the contemplated novel-essay eventually assumed the form of a novel called *The Years*, which fictionalizes serious facts and transforms them into a poetic truth. Despite the more objective style of the novel, Woolf does not state the meaning of this truth directly and unequivocally. Even though she, in contrast with her previous lyrical novels, describes the events from the outside, even here the narrative consciousness identifies itself with various characters who form their own thoughts and feelings into an effort to create a unified understanding of the world from the chaos around them.

Woolf could not include the facts contained in the six essays of the unfinished novel-essay *The Pargiters* in the novel *The Years*, because she realized that these facts would be in contradiction with her artistic intention of this work. For the most part she

[6] See the essay "The New Biography" in *Granite and Rainbow*. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1960).

used the material of these essays for a large polemical piece *Three Guineas* (1938), which is, in a sense, a loose sequel to *The Years*.

## 3. *Orlando*, the Precursor of *The Years*

*Orlando* and *The Years* are such different novels in their style and the overall structure that it may seem, if we look at them superficially, that these two works have nothing in common save their author. That which so fundamentally differentiates *Orlando* from *The Years*, but also from everything Woolf wrote before and after, is the spirit of satire and free flight of fancy, wit and humour, which sprang from the spontaneity aroused by Woolf's specific perception of life as "a cascade, a glissade, a torrent; all together" (*AWD* 117). It is necessary to understand the subtitle "A Biography" in the same sense the author herself gave it, that is, as a parody which points to weaknesses and pitfalls of this genre, because, in her opinion, a biographer "is a craftsman, not an artist; and his work is not a work of art, but something betwixt and between" (*The Death of the Moth* 125).[7] Howard Harper points out that Woolf's essay "The New Biography", which is essentially a review of Harold Nicolson's *Some People*, illuminates the method of *Orlando*.[8] It is quite apparent that in *Orlando* Woolf parodies the futile effort of biographers to join together two very incongruous things, i.e. truth, which is "something of granite-like solidity", and personality, which is "something of rainbow-like

[7] See the essay "The Art of Biography" in *The Death of the Moth*. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1947).
[8] Harper, 166.

intangibility [...], into one seamless whole."[9] She identifies the 'biographer' as 'he', which is taken to be an allusion to the male domination of the literary world.[10] She leaves him, with almost a malicious pleasure, to struggle with unusual biographical material, so that she could show that there are certain aspects of the life of an individual which cannot be easily grasped by any biography, because they require a different manner of expression, which goes well beyond the bounds of the objective and possible. It is because "Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us, making us so unequally of clay and diamonds, of rainbow and granite, [...] nature, who delights in muddle and mystery, so that [...] our most daily movements are like the passage of a ship on an unknown sea" (*Orlando* 46).

Despite the light-hearted tone and mockery of the ways of writing biographies, despite the author's sabbatical from the serious preoccupation with form and technique and the pleasure from being able to poke fun at her own style, her aim remains the same. It likewise endures in her creative work and her personal life, which are two inseparable parts of her own being. The sentences written in *A Writer's Diary* more than a year before she came up with the idea "that she might write a Defoe narrative for fun"[11] give some evidence of this aim:

> Yet I have some restless searcher in me. Why is there not a discovery in life? Sometimes one can lay hands on and say 'This is it'? My depression is a harassed feeling. I'm looking: but that's not it – that's not it. What is it? And shall I die before I find it? (*AWD* 86)

These questions are underpinned by two feelings. One of them is a satisfactory sense of something great and astonishing, called up by an image of the moon rising over Persia.

[9] For further information on the subject of the methods of biography, see the essay "The New Biography" in *Granite and Rainbow*, 149-155
[10] Harper, 171.
[11] See *A Writer's Diary*, 105.

The other feeling is the sense of one's own strangeness and the infinite oddity of the human position, giving rise to such recurrent questions as who am I, what am I, and so on. Questions of a similar kind occupy both the eternally young figure of the mythic Orlando, who with an astonishing ease manages his flight through the centuries, and the figures embodying the three generations of the Pargiters, whose voyage through life runs aground more than once.

Undoubtedly, the continuity of ideas, in the process of discovering unknown dimensions of life through the experience of perceived reality, goes through the entire oeuvre of Virginia Woolf. The wish to transcend the boundaries of the known and the visible so that man could uncover the more profound meaning of his own existence lies beneath the surface of *Orlando* and *The Years*. If we want to explore Woolf's serious topics in *Orlando*, we must look for them in this "half laughing, half serious"[12] work right in the centre of the provocative light-heartedness of the story. The seeming easiness of the style, humour, wit, parody and exaggeration enable Woolf to approach certain topics with much greater immediacy than she could do in her serious works.

Time is an important factor in both of these novels which, similar to other works of Virginia Woolf, is connected with individual experience and its perception. It is therefore a relative and a more psychological and qualitative concept than an absolute measurable quantity.

The descriptions of weather have a metaphorical meaning in both novels to create an atmosphere of a particular historical period and its peculiarities or its social and political situation. In *The Years* these metaphors move within the bounds of reality, in *Orlando* they assume fantastic and extravagant proportions.

[12] See *A Writer's Diary*, 120.

# 4. *Orlando: A Biography*

## 4.1 The Portrait and Its Model

In spite of the fact that the novel is not a biography, it has its source in biographical material which, though parodied and transformed beyond recognition, constitutes a brilliant surface layer underneath which is hidden what Guiguet calls "the middle strata of the work"[13] with its undeniable significance and value comparable with the rest of Woolf's work. The 'importance' which Woolf puts into inverted commas in her diary when attempting to determine what place this novel occupies in her entire oeuvre[14] is, according to Guiguet, perhaps "'importance' of another sort – [...] which is only to be discovered by probing below the middle strata."[15] It points to the unlimited and complex nature of a human being and to the mysteries of life which perpetually evade human understanding.

The surface layer of *Orlando* contains what the other novels of Woolf lack: irony, humour, passion, dramatic tension and narrative. It is simultaneously, however, a very opaque and perplexing layer, despite the style, which is, in Woolf's own words, "very clear and plain so that people will understand every word" (*AWD* 117). It is certainly unnecessary to explore this surface layer in great detail in order to understand various particulars and allusions. Nevertheless, it is useful to familiarize oneself with at least certain facts concerning the life of Vita Sackville-West (henceforth referred to as Vita), to whom this novel is dedicated, as well as with the life stories of some of her ancestors. This will help us to see not only how the complex and contradictory

[13] See Guiguet, 279.
[14] See *A Writer's Diary*, 128: "[*Orlando*] is too freakish ...Not, I think 'important' among my works."
[15] See Guiguet, 279.

personality of Orlando's model is reflected in the figure of Woolf's fictitious Orlando, but also how the boundaries of this model are transcended by Woolf's own artistic vision and the creative process.

The story of the mythical Orlando is a synthesis of two ideas for books which Woolf intended writing after the completion of *To the Lighthouse*. The first of the books, entitled *The Jessamy Brides*, was to be a mixture of vivid fantasy and satire, and Woolf envisioned the book to be dealing with two poor solitary women who, "at the top of a house", dream of Constantinople and golden domes. Sapphism was to be suggested. Everything was to be mocked and satirized including her own lyric vein.[16] The second, in Woolf's opinion "a most amusing book", which was to be "truthful but fantastic", was to portray some of her friends, including Vita as Orlando, a young nobleman.[17] A month later we find a note in Woolf's diary that "It [*Orlando*] is based on Vita, Violet Trefusis, Lord Lascelles, Knole, etc" (*AWD* 117).

Violet Trefusis is a prototype for Sasha, the Russian princess with whom Orlando falls passionately in love, and plunges into an amorous adventure described in the first chapter, in the scene of the Great Frost. The role which this writer, Vita's intimate friend, plays in *Orlando* is perhaps less scandalous than the one this woman actually played in Vita's life. In the fourth chapter dealing with the eighteenth century she is one of the women with whom Orlando, cross-dressed as a man on an amorous expedition, forms a close friendship. There is a sentence referring to Violet Trefusis in *Orlando* which runs as follows: "Several were the natural daughters of earls and one was a good deal nearer than she should have been to the King's person"[18] (*Orlando* 140).

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[16] Cf. *A Writer's Diary*, 105.
[17] Cf. *A Writer's Diary*, 114.
[18] Violet Trefusis (née Keppel) was the daughter of Edward VII's mistress. See Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), 488 and 629.

This woman is also "a certain lady," with whom Orlando fled "to the Low Countries where the lady's husband followed them"[19] (*Orlando* 142). In chapter six another mention of "a certain lady," refers to the mother of Violet Trefusis: "King Edward [...] stepping out of his neat brougham to go and visit a certain lady opposite" (*Orlando* 194).

Harper, on the basis of Nigel Nicolson's *Portrait of a Marriage*, identifies Lord Lascelles, who wooed Vita in 1912-1913, as the prototype for the Archduchess Harriet / Archduke Harry.[20] In the seventeenth century he is that man in the novel who, upon seeing Orlando's portrait, falls hopelessly in love with him and keeps pursuing him so relentlessly that Orlando flees to Turkey in order to get rid of him. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this person no longer pretends a feminine identity and reveals his true masculine nature as the Archduke Harry, and Orlando, now as a woman, must employ the various tricks and arts of her sex to withstand his advances.

The character of Orlando embodies certain salient character and physical traits, not only of Vita herself, but also of her ancestors. Vita inherited a pair of nicely shaped legs and a spirited, passionate nature from Rosina Pepita, the Spanish gipsy dancer from her mother's side, with whom Vita's grandfather, Lionel Sackville-West, lived for nineteen years and had five illegitimate children, two boys and three girls, one of whom was Vita's mother, Victoria Sackville-West. Orlando's legs are alluded to in various places in the book. While still a man, Orlando's legs are admired by Queen Elizabeth, Sasha, the Archduchess Harriet and Nell Gwynn, a mistress of King Charles II, who before Orlando's departure to Turkey sincerely regrets "that such a pair of legs should leave the country" (*Orlando* 73). The legs of Orlando as a woman attract, of course, no

[19] This refers to an incident in 1920 when Vita and Violet Trefusis escaped to France together and their husbands pursued them to fetch them back. It marks a culmination of Vita's passionate affair with Violet, which started in 1918, a year after she found out that her husband, Harold, was homosexual and had VD. See Lee, 488.
[20] See Harper, 165.

less attention from the opposite sex. A reference to Rosina Pepita is also made in connection with Orlando's marriage when he was still a man and Ambassador in Turkey. In chapter four Woolf refers to this marriage by shadowy allusions to conflicts over property and lawsuits which Orlando has to face after her return from Turkey. These allusions concern the year 1910 when Vita was a witness to the scandalous trial in which her mother, who was married to her cousin Lionel Sackville-West, had to defend her right to Knole by swearing in High Court that she and her siblings were illegitimate.[21] Woolf mentions this trial and Orlando's satisfaction with its outcome also in chapter five, where Orlando reads to her fiancé Shel some important rulings contained in a legal document: "'Turkish marriage annulled (I was ambassador in Constantinople, Shel,' she explained). 'Children pronounced illegitimate (they said I had three sons by Pepita, a Spanish dancer). So they don't inherit, which is all to the good...'" (*Orlando* 166).

Despite being fascinated with her exotic ancestors from her mother's side, Vita was even more proud of her Sackville heritage. In her fictional works she was keenly interested in questions raised by mixed heredity. The motif of the northern and southern blood also appears in her long poem *The Land*:

> A gipsy Judith, witch of a ragged tent,
> And I shrank from the English field of fritillaries
> Before I should be too late, before I forget
> The cherry white in the woods, and the curled clouds,
> And the lapwings crying free above the plough.[22]

Vita's awareness of the continuity of the Sackville family reverberates in *Orlando*; in that sense Vita "transcended the limits of her own lifetime" (Harper 170). The figure of Orlando does not only reflect Vita herself but the whole Sackville family. In this novel

[21] See Harper, 186 where he refers to the information on this subject contained in Nicolson's *Portrait of a Marriage* (1973).
[22] *The Land* quoted in Stevens, 40.

Woolf used as an inspiration the five Sackvilles, whom Vita, in her book *Knole and the Sackvilles*, selected as the typical representatives of her family in the individual historical periods. Based on the information obtained from this book of Vita's, Harper shows how each of the first five chapters of *Orlando* roughly corresponds to the life of one of these five figures.[23] In the initial pages of the first chapter, Woolf captures the most important event in the history of the Sackville family, which is the fact that the first of the family, Thomas Sackville (1536 – 1608), the cousin of Queen Elizabeth, whom Vita describes as "the grave Elizabethan", gained the Queen's favour and was appointed Lord High Treasurer of England. When he was twenty, "Queen Elizabeth presented him with Knole, one of the great country houses of England and, even at that time, a building of some magnificence and fame."[24] Vita, in *Knole and the Sackvilles*, also mentions that in 1586 Thomas Sackville "was one of the forty appointed on the commission for the trial of Mary Stuart, [...] he was sent to announce the sentence to death."[25] In the first chapter, in the sequence in which she describes the beginnings of Orlando's career in the court of Queen Elizabeth, Woolf's remark refers to this event: "She [Queen Elizabeth] sent him to Scotland on a sad embassy to the unhappy Queen" (*Orlando* 11).

The second representative of the Sackvilles, is Edward Sackville, 4th Earl of Dorset, the grandson of Thomas Sackville, whom Vita calls "the cavalier." When she was fourteen, Vita wrote her first novel about him. In the second chapter of *Orlando*, some of the characteristic features of this figure find reflection in Orlando's interest in

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[23] See Harper, 173.

[24] *Knole and the Sackvilles* quoted in Stevens, 14.

[25] *Knole and the Sackvilles* quoted in Harper, 173.

poetry, philosophy and the house, the list of furnishings of which, Woolf's exaggeration inflates to comic proportions.

The life story of Charles Sackville, 6th Earl of Dorset, the third representative on Vita's list, seems to have no connection to the story of Orlando, which in the third chapter assumes the most exotic and fantastic forms. While in England, Vita's "florid magnificent Charles" courts Nell Gwynn, an actress and mistress of King Charles II, in Turkey Orlando goes through his transformation into a "ravishing young woman" and subsequently experiences a wild episode among the gipsies.

John Frederick Sackville, 3rd Duke of Dorset, whom Vita calls "the gay and fickle Duke," served Woolf as a model for the female Orlando's exploration of social and cultural life in London during the reign of Queen Anne. Vita's records of this Sackville were apparently a source of information for Woolf about certain peculiarities of the private lives of Addison, Pope and Swift. Knole probably often hosted these poets in its Poets' Parlour. Woolf describes Orlando's encounters with these great men of English literature as follows: "[Orlando] feasted them royally in the Round Parlour, which she had hung with their pictures all in a circle, so that Mr Pope could not say that Mr Addison came before him, or the other way about" (*Orlando* 135-6).

The last person, significant from the perspective of what Vita calls the 'representativeness' of the Sackvilles, is George John Frederick, 4th Duke of Dorset, "the last direct male," who died without an heir at the age of twenty-one. Harper believes that an allusion to his death in a hunting accident is made in chapter five, in the episode in which Orlando runs over the moor, up the hill, then she trips, her ankle is broken and she wishes to die. An eccentric sailor, Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, who as Deux ex machina appears just at the moment of Orlando's symbolic dying, plays a similar role in the novel to the one played by Vita's husband, Harold Nicolson, in

Vita's life. Marriage provided Vita with a protective structure, without significantly diminishing her freedom. Thus Orlando also finds her independence and new possibilities of her creative work in the acceptance of the bond of marriage. Cape Horn, which is the heading of Shelmerdine's recurrent voyages aboard his brig, could be, according to Harper, "the cruel suggestion of the horns of the cuckold here, which Vita provided for him more than once – with men and women both."[26]

Vita's personality as the climactic incarnation of the Sackvilles is projected into the character of Orlando to the greatest extent in the sixth chapter. But hints to the peculiarities of Vita's character, which Woolf was so familiar with, are scattered throughout the whole book. The confusion of the young Orlando, whose feelings oscillate between the desire for similar kinds of achievement like those his ancestors accomplished on numerous battlefields and his love of nature and literature, corresponds with Vita's own feelings. Her feelings had mainly to do with various limitations stemming from the fact that she was born a woman. She admired the poet, Thomas Sackville, who made a reputation for himself as one of the dramatists of the Pre-Shakespearean period, and Vita strove for this type of achievement as evidenced by the extensive literary efforts of her youth. The fact that she wrote eight novels (one of which was in French) and five plays by the time she was eighteen, seem even more remarkable than the literary efforts of Woolf's Orlando: "Thus had been written, before he was turned 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 long" (*Orlando* 45). Vita's early writing is tied in with her passion for Italy, with her preoccupation with mysticism and the beauty of Italian Renaissance. According to Harper, Vita's early novels and plays are infused with the spirit of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso.* Similarly, he

[26] See Harper, 188.

views the period of her love affairs as "the furioso, or frenzied phase of Vita's life."[27] If *Orlando Furioso* points to this aspect of Vita's life, which Woolf in the novel transforms into a mild parody, then the etymological meaning of the name Orlando – "the glory of the land" – as the portrait of Vita, indicates totally different features of this personality. In this etymological meaning Harper sees not only "a tribute to the Sackville lineage of which Vita was so proud" but also "an acknowledgement of her love for the country and for gardening, as well as a veiled allusion to her long poem *The Land*, for which she was awarded the Hawthornden Prize."[28] This poem, which Vita wrote with a couple of interruptions from June 1923 to April 1926, serves as a model for Orlando's "The Oak Tree". In Woolf's conception the three-hundred-year-old evolution of this poem corresponds with the growth of Orlando as a writer, and his understanding of the meaning and aim of the creative process.

Orlando's escapes to solitude, the only place where he can transform the perceived reality of nature and his feelings for the family estate into a certain kind of understanding, coincide with Vita's feelings and ties which she formed to certain places, particularly Knole. Orlando rambles through the vast house as Vita did from her earliest childhood.[29] When Woolf says that "it appeared as if to be alone in the great house of his fathers suited his temper" (*Orlando* 40), she alludes, on the one hand, to a character trait which Vita inherited from her family, on the other, to "her lack of contact with her mother."[30] Orlando's "need of something [hard] which he could attach his floating heart to" (*Orlando* 7) refers to the need the fulfilment of which Vita found in Knole, the house she identified with as "a symbol of permanence, a firm ground beneath her feet."[31] The

[27] Ibid., 170.
[28] Ibid., 169.
[29] See Stevens, 24.
[30] Ibid., 25.
[31] Ibid., 25.

strength of her feelings for Knole, treating it almost as if it was a living being, is shown by the following stanza of her unpublished poem:

> Knole, when I went from you, you missed
>
> One of your many children, specially?
>
> God knows I gave you all my love, my agony,
>
> Scarcely a stone of you I had not kissed.[32]

In the sixth chapter, which reflects Vita's presence until the year 1927, the fictitious figure of Orlando and its living model come closer together in the references to some important events of Vita's life, as for example the birth of her first son (1914) or the fact that she was awarded the Hawthornden Prize for her poem *The Land* (1927). In the novel it is the Burdett Coutts Memorial Prize which Orlando receives for her poem "The Oak Tree". The single event which affected Vita in the most painful way was the death of her father, the 3rd Baron Sackville, on 28 January 1928.[33] Woolf finished *Orlando* in March 1928, thus the novel could encompass her fictional rendering of this event and its consequences, which for Vita meant the permanent loss of Knole because she, being a woman, could not inherit.[34] The motif of Vita's farewell to Knole appears in the last pages of the sixth chapter. One of its expressions can be seen in the image of a tunnel, where retrospectively, right before Orlando's eyes, the entire history of the Sackville estate unfolds as far as the furthest bounds of memory. The other representation of the motif of farewell is Orlando's idea, which was never realized, to

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[32] Ibid., 115. At the end of his critical biography, Stevens presents a selection of a few of a total of one hundred and ninety-seven unpublished poems of Vita Sackville-West, the drafts of which he found in her study at Sissinghurst Castle which he visited in 1963.

[33] See *The Diary of Virginia Woolf. Vol. 3, 1925-1930*. Ed. Anne Olivier Bell, assisted by Andrew McNeillie. (London : The Hogarth Press, 1980), 174.

[34] For further details on Knole after the death of Vita's father see Stevens, 26 and Harper, 165. In 1928 Knole passed to Vita's uncle Charles who gave it to the National Trust in 1946.

bury her poem "The Oak Tree", the fictitious version of the poem *The Land*, saturated with Vita's love for tradition, which Vita wanted to bury in her heart together with Knole. But the words which Vita wrote in a letter to her husband, Harold Nicolson, twenty-eight years later give evidence of the futility of this effort: "Oh God, I do wish that Knole hadn't got such a hold on my heart! If only I had been Dada's son, instead of his daughter! I hoped that I had damped down the fire into embers, but the embers blow up into a flame at one breath, so easily."[35] The motif of farewell is most poignantly expressed when Orlando returns the estate to the dead Queen Elizabeth: "'The house is at your service, Ma'am,' she cried, curtseying deeply. 'Nothing has been changed. The dead Lord, my father, shall lead you in'" (*Orlando* 215).

It is clear that it is impossible to recognize any deeper connection between the novel and reality purely on the basis of some facts of Vita's own life and her ancestral past. I believe that it is fruitless to explore the extent to which the personal plateau, i.e. the relationship between Virginia Woolf and Vita, is reflected in the novel. The one-sided emphasis on these aspects might overshadow other qualities of the work which then, when looked upon from this perspective, can be seen merely as "something of an anomaly" tied to Woolf's life rather than to her other novels.[36] In spite of the fact that the letters and diaries reveal a lot about the friendship of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, they cannot be regarded as a completely reliable source of information on the nature of this relationship. Lee remarks: "Both these women were professional writers. They cast each other, and themselves, in dramatic roles."[37]

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[35] Quoted in Stevens, 26.

[36] See an essay by Jean O. Love, "*Orlando* and Its Genesis: Venturing and Experimenting in Art, Love, and Sex" in Freedman, Ralph (Ed.). *Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity. A Collection of Essays*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 189-218.

[37] Lee, 485.

The portrait of an artist, which Woolf depicted on the basis of Vita Sackville-West who served as the model for Orlando, was transformed by the author into such a form as enabled her to express her own views of art and the meaning of the creative process as well as to touch upon topics which she later develops in her essays *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*.

## 4.2 *Orlando*, Time as a Qualitative Aspect of Reality

"I don't believe in ageing. I believe in forever altering one's aspect to the sun. Hence my optimism" (*AWD* 187). These words, written four years after publishing *Orlando*, seem as if they were distant reverberations of feelings which guided Woolf's creative imagination from the original idea to the final realization of this novel, in which time is so astonishingly flexible that it loses its destructive effects and becomes an element which perpetually renews youth, beauty and the positive attitude to life.

The years, decades and centuries are a natural part of the fictitious Orlando, in the same way as the historical time is connected with the specific inhabitants of Knole, the ancestral seat of the Sackville family. The three hundred and sixty-five bedrooms and fifty-two staircases of this great house symbolize a calendar integrated into its history. The metaphor for the passage of time is "the light airs which for ever moved about the galleries stirred the blue and green arras, so that it looked as if the huntsmen were riding and Daphne flying" (*Orlando* 67).[38] The motif of Daphne pursued by Apollo

[38] The arras depicts scenes from *Orlando Furioso*, an Italian romantic epic by Ludovico Ariosto written in 1532 which was translated in its complete form into English by John Harrington in 1591. The scenes on the tapestry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century were made by the Flemish artist Franz Spierincz.

may, according to Harper, symbolize the eternal search for perfect love and perfect art.[39] These values cannot be fully achieved by a human being, but the time spent in search for them is not wasted time.

The moving arras with hunters is mentioned in the book a number of times, not only as a reminder of the unceasing passage of time, but also of the fact that time is a part of human beings, and that in them it is not measured by the clocks but by the beating of their hearts. In the hearts of all people, as well as in the heart of the temporal character Orlando, are stored not only their own memories and experiences, but also "memory traces of the experiences of former generations" which form the "archaic heritage of mankind" (Freud 127).

As early as at the beginning of the first chapter, Woolf suggests the relationship of her hero to both subjective time and historical time. The head of a Moor hanging from the rafters in the attic, swings like a pendulum, perpetually moving in the breeze blowing through the house. It reminds Orlando of the past and the courageous deeds of his male ancestors, whose bones decay in the tombs in the Chapel, and its grin points to destruction and death, which are his future as well. The boyish game of the sixteen year old Orlando – slicing at the shrivelled head of a Moor, "the symbolic action of the killing of time exhibits the individual's unconscious yearning for immortality, for no-time" (Richter 154).

The fantastic idea to let Orlando age by only twenty years in the period of three hundred and fifty years enables Woolf to experiment with the complex inner experience of time which may have little in common with external chronology of the objective world:

[39] For further details on Ariosto's poem and Harrington's translation as well as the Flemish tapestry, see Harper 166-168 and 195.

> But Time, unfortunately, though it makes animals and vegetables bloom and fade with amazing punctuality, has no such simple effect upon the mind of man. The mind of man, moreover, works with equal strangeness upon the body of time. An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second. (*Orlando* 59)

When one has reached the age of maturity then "time when he [in this case Orlando] is thinking becomes inordinately long" (*Orlando* 59), so that man by contemplation and the search for answers to complex questions of life can fictitiously go through entire decades. In a few seconds man may understand what would otherwise take him long years of desperate search.

By means of accelerating and decelerating time, prolonging a moment and conversely shortening long time periods – decades and centuries – Woolf uses this method to allow her hero/heroine to control time and fill the time with his/her "different temporal selves" (Rosenthal 140). One of the secrets of human life Woolf sees in the fact that the mind of man is dominated by two opposing forces, brevity and diuturnity. Thus, it is possible that Orlando lives through twenty-five years of his life between breakfast and dinner and only a few seconds in several weeks: "It would be no exaggeration to say that he would go out after breakfast a man of thirty and come home to dinner a man of fifty-five at least. Some weeks added a century to his age, others no more than three seconds at most" (*Orlando* 60).

By creating an impression of an accelerated and decelerated action Woolf conveys the emotional response of a character to various situations. These accelerations and decelerations sometimes alternate quickly as evidenced, for example, by the opening

pages of the first chapter. The need to get hold of something solid and enduring leads Orlando to the top of a hill under an oak tree where time, in silence and contemplation, comes to a standstill: "the little leaves hung, the deer stopped; the pale summer clouds stayed" (*Orlando* 11). The sound of a trumpet announcing the Queen's arrival invades the silence of a summer night and plunges Orlando into a strange stillness, in which state he observes the mixing of lights and figures on the estate. This state is followed by an excited hurry, which Woolf expresses by short, concise sentences, propelling Orlando towards a political career.[40] But before she lets him sink to his knees before Queen Elizabeth, she stops time for a while and in the most unexpected place, in the back quarters where the servants lived, engraves indelibly to his mind an image of the greatest English poet. The subsequent flight of Orlando into the banqueting-hall is alternated with prolonged moments of perception of the contrast between Orlando's youth and charm and the Queen's old body affected by illness. The sense of these moments is not only visual. The smell of the magnificent Queen's dress is the smell of the past transported to the present moment.

In the first chapter in the scene of the Great Frost, Woolf prolongs a fleeting moment almost to a standstill. The frost, which is of unusual strength and effects, causes birds to freeze in mid-air and they fall like stones to the ground, people and animals freeze on their way somewhere and while doing their customary activities, and the Thames freezes to a depth of twenty feet. The image of the frost enables Woolf to manipulate time, perpetually extending moments of Orlando's enchantment with Sasha,

[40] In this sequence Orlando corresponds roughly to "the grave Elizabethan," Thomas Sackville, 1st Earl of Dorset (1536 – 1608). He is the first of the five Sackvilles Vita Sackville-West selects as the main representatives of the Sackville family. See, Harper 173. Thomas Sackville, cousin to Queen Elizabeth, was knighted, created Lord Buckhurst, of Buckhurst in Sussex, appointed Lord Chancellor of Oxford University and in 1599 was made Lord High Treasurer of England. In 1556 Queen Elizabeth presented him with Knole, one of the great country houses of England. After the death of Queen Elizabeth, James I elevated him to an Earldom as Earl Dorset in 1604. See Michael Stevens, *V. Sackville-West: A Critical Biography*. (Stockholm, 1972), 13-14.

the mysterious Russian Princess. The magnificent carnival on the Thames[41] held by James I on the occasion of his coronation, resembling a park or pleasure ground, becomes a place where Orlando's passion blazes up like colourful flames of huge bonfires burning on the ice. The frost, however, which froze the country folk and animals solid, does not paradoxically have the same effect on the participants of the carnival, it plunges them, in contrast, into the whirl of dancing and skating which is also part of this peculiar and bewildering reverie.

Time in its emotional duration enables Orlando to experience the intensity of enchantment and passion, even despair caused by a sense of betrayal. A few moments of watching a theatrical performance of Shakespeare's play in the Globe draws Orlando into Othello's endless misery, which he perceives as his own. Orlando's waiting for Sasha the night before their planned flight is the last instance of the decelerated time in the scene of the Great Frost. Even before St Paul's struck the first stroke of midnight, the first raindrops, announcing the thaw, struck Orlando's face, signifying the end of one historical period. As they grow in intensity and change into a profuse downpour, the ice on the Thames breaks and a race of turbulent yellow waters sweeps everything into the sea of the past. The decelerated time in the moments of enchantment and infatuation is alternated with an accelerated time, symbolised by the racing waters destroying the ice as well as Orlando's love for Sasha.

The opposite of a deceleration or stopping of time is an acceleration, or even a temporal shortcut. Such shortcuts are Orlando's week-long sleeps, as well, which also

[41] The carnival scene in *Orlando* was so popular that it inspired "a Gawdy on the Frozen Thames" (but in fact taking place on the Grosvenor House ice-rink). It was organized by Lord Riddell, Lady Newness and Lady Burney. Virginia Woolf mentions this occasion in her letter to Vita Sackville-West: "Oh and tonight theyre [the lack apostrophes in this extract is symptomatic of her hasty writing] dancing Orlando on the ice, and I shant be there. Its a remarkable fact – the whole British peerage says they descend from the Courtiers I invented, and still have the snow boots which they wore on the frost which I invented too." See *The Sickle Side of the Moon : The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Vol. V: 1932-1935*. Ed. Nigel Nicolson, assist. ed. Joanne Trautmann. (London : The Hogarth Press, 1979), 153.

are among the methods by means of which Woolf creates Orlando's new temporal selves. During the first sleep which takes place after Orlando's love affair with Sasha, Orlando's scale of values changes; his desire for love is followed by his desire for fame, the fulfilment of which he sees in his own literary work.

A far more marked slowing of time is shown in chapter three, where the action seems to exist outside of time. An intriguing piece of family history happens between the movement by which the Ambassador Orlando draws a curtain of a balcony window at the Embassy in Constantinople and the beginning of his second week-long sleep. This period, the intimacy and inviolability of which is protected by a drawn curtain, Woolf sums up to the following two sentences:

> Then, she said, a woman, much muffled, but apparently of the peasant class, was drawn up by means of a rope which the man let down to her on to the balcony. There, the washer-woman said, they embraced passionately 'like lovers', and went into the room together, drawing the curtains so that no more could be seen. (*Orlando* 83)

This blurred period of Orlando's masculine identity is a time of a love affair of Lionel Sackville-West and a Spanish gipsy dancer Rosina Pepita (her real name was Josefa Duran y Ortega de la Oliva) by whom this direct descendant of Thomas Sackville had five children.[42] Orlando's second week-long sleep conceals the secret of the creation of Orlando's new self, being a sudden sex change from male to female. The meaning of this temporal demarcation is again qualitative and emotional rather than quantitative and physical. It represents Orlando's gradual departure from her longing for the masculine forms of achievement of her ancestors and reconciling with the fact that she was born a female.

[42] See Stevens, 13-16.

In the last chapter Woolf compares Orlando's travelling in time to a tunnel where the light pours in. It is a tunnel bored deep into the past but opening into the present, which illuminates the past. It allows Orlando to see, as if from a distance, her various temporal selves but what matters most is to find her own real self, some "wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others."[43] It is almost as if we are here getting the reverberations of the narrative consciousness which Woolf put into the mind of Mrs Ramsay, in her previous novel. This core of personality cannot be completely engulfed and lost in the chaos of the present moment, through which we walk as if on a narrow plank but "the past shelters us on one side and the future on another" (*Orlando* 195).

## 4.3 *Orlando*, The Search for the Real Self and the Shaping of Poetic Vision

Even though we must admit that *Orlando* is a closed book for us in many respects and we can agree with Guiguet that "only the person to whom it was dedicated, for whom, actually, it was written – Vita Sackville-West – can solve the riddle of it",[44] it does not mean that we should read it differently from other works of Virginia Woolf. Woolf refused to 'get down to her depths' in this novel, however, the fundamental subject remains the same as in her other works. The only thing that is different is her perspective, from which she views this subject, and the way she treats it. Concealed under various disguises and masks, the aim remains the same, whether Woolf's hero/heroine is in pursuit of it at the court of Queen Elizabeth, James I, among the

[43] See *To the Lighthouse*. (London: Grafton Books, 1977), 70.

[44] Guiguet, 263.

gypsies in Turkey, in salons of the greatest ladies in the reign of Queen Anne, in a kind of dark age of the nineteenth century or in the all-encompassing hustle and bustle of the present (1920s). Despite being put into brackets, Woolf gives an assurance to the reader that the thing which Orlando incessantly strives for is a high-priced commodity: "Thus time ran on, and Orlando could often be heard saying to herself with an emphasis which might, perhaps, make the hearer a little suspicious, 'Upon my soul, what a life this is!' (For she was still in search of that commodity.)" (*Orlando* 136).

Woolf gives Orlando at his/her disposal three hundred and thirty nine years of history to allow him to clearly define his identity. In 1588, this long search for identity is started by Orlando, a sixteen-year old, immature boy with ambivalent and rather perplexed views of himself. In 1927, at the end of this journey, emerges Orlando, a thirty-six year old, mature woman fully-conscious of her own self. Orlando's long maturation has a linear character which corresponds to the spontaneous and optimistic spirit of the whole work. The portrayal of history, which Woolf presents together with the story of Orlando, does not proceed in the same progressive way as the psychological development of its hero/heroine, who at the end of each historical period uncovers an increasingly mature manifestation of self. In the successive historical periods, the atmosphere of which Woolf so masterly depicts, Orlando lives his/her 'here and now'. His/her perception of the tension of the 'here and now' happens in the continuous interactions with what Woolf calls 'the spirit of the age'. These interactions with his/her present moment and evanescence produce an experience which facilitates the continuity of life and culture.

Every period has its characteristic atmosphere, its typical spirit and fashion which Woolf mentions throughout the novel in many places. 'The fashion of the time' may disguise, though not completely alter, one's true nature. The Elizabethan period,

and the milieu, exert an influence on Orlando, and thus he practices martial skills and believes that one day when he grows up, he will measure up to his warrior ancestors. In his innermost self there is also a part of the poet Thomas Sackville, and this influence may perhaps lead him to hang the shriveled head of a Moor, which he repeatedly slices with his blade, almost out of reach. Such uncertainty and indecisiveness are not masculine properties and do not fit in with 'the spirit of the age,' the unambiguousness of which Woolf puts so aptly: "The rain fell vehemently, or not at all. The sun blazed or there was darkness. [...] Violence was all. The flower bloomed and faded. The sun rose and sank. The lover loved and went" (*Orlando* 12). Orlando's heart is not controlled by the obsession with death and warfare characteristic of his belligerent ancestors, but it is rather ruled by a passion for literature and writing, the two things which are crucial in his life. His early literary efforts reflect his adolescent mind and his effort to imitate a style which is alien to him, thus not allowing him to express his own feelings and perception of the world. It is the beginning of a long journey of self-exploration which is a necessary precondition for finding his own artistic self.

A fleeting encounter by the sixteen-year old Orlando with the greatest figure of the era astounds him without making him understand anything whatsoever. The encounter with this great dramatist and poet is never equalled, and no individual of similar stature crosses Orlando's path again. Time and again, before Orlando's eyes emerges an image of "the face of that rather fat, shabby man who [...] had the most amazing eyes [...] that ever were" (*Orlando* 47). The feeling that he really was a poet, that man who once sat at the servant's dinner table and wrote, while in the banqueting-hall of the estate sat Queen Elizabeth, becomes more clear at the end of the last chapter. But his influence, which gradually and surreptitiously shapes Orlando's perception and understanding of his own self and the world, is so subdued and insidious that even the

very name of its bearer cannot be uttered in the same matter-of-fact way as other names: "Or was it Sh-p--re? (for when we speak names we deeply reverence to ourselves we never speak them whole)" (*Orlando* 204).

The artist's search for one's own journey is an intricate process, which cannot be done without making any mistakes. The boy Orlando, upon meeting Shakespeare, has an unspoken wish to learn from the poet "'everything in the whole world'– for he had the wildest, most absurd, extravagant ideas about poets and poetry" (*Orlando* 8). Later, when he realizes the impracticability of such a wish he turns his attention to only a few topics. Disappointed by Sasha's cruel betrayal of his love, he tries to explore existential questions which concern mainly the transience of human life and possible forms of immortality. Frustrated with the futility of the endeavours of his warrior ancestors, behind whom there amasses only the detritus of decaying bones, he finds out that their deeds, however lustrous they once seemed, have a lesser chance at immortality than the words in books of famous writers. Woolf shifts Orlando's attention to one of the writers of the seventeenth century, Thomas Browne. The idea of unity of scientific thinking and mystical religious faith appears in his work. This aspect is close to Woolf's conception of the meeting and merging of the worlds of fact and vision. The spurned love is in Orlado's heart supplanted by "Ambition, the harridan, and Poetry, the witch, and Desire of Fame, the strumpet" (*Orlando* 48).

The journey of self-knowledge leads Orlando to discover his new temporal selves. At the time when he is governed by the quest for poetic immortality, he starts to think of himself more as a writer than a nobleman, and dreams of writing a book which would bring him immortality. He finds out, however, that the battles of his ancestors "were not half so arduous as this which he now undertook to win immortality against the English language" (*Orlando* 48). Woolf illustrates such a battle by parodying her own

style of writing: “how he wrote and it seemed good; read and it seemed vile; corrected and tore up; cut out; put in; was in ecstasy; in despair; [...] acted his people's parts as he ate; mouthed them as he walked” (*Orlando* 49).

The character of Nicholas Greene, a dubious poet and critic, has, in contrast with the figure of Shakespeare, the ability of reincarnation. It is because human beings of his kind exist in every period. He is the kind of person who criticizes, gossips and mocks his contemporaries while he sponges off them, he is verbose but says nothing of consequence. Orlando wants to learn from him everything he knows about poetry, but instead he hears only his denunciations of Elizabethan literature – “the art of poetry was dead in England”[45] – and counsels Orlando always to pursue “La Gloire (he pronounced it Glawr, so that Orlando did not at first catch his meaning)” (*Orlando* 53). Nick Greene responds to Orlando’s hospitality by exposing Orlando and his play The Death of Hercules to ridicule.

This experience causes Orlando to shed his illusions about people, but is beneficial to the development of his personality as an artist. It helps him to acquire the ability to recognize true art from imitation. That is why Orlando burns his “fifty-seven poetical works, only retaining ‘The Oak Tree’, which was his boyish dream and very short” (*Orlando* 58). This unassuming poem is altogether different from his long ambitious works, which were written with the view of bringing him fame and poetic immortality. The realization, that fame ties one down but obscurity is liberating, allows Orlando to enter the field of personal quest and immersion in profound thought. This is possible only in anonymity, without a name, when a person is “like a wave which returns to the deep body of the sea” (*Orlando* 63). Orlando wants to create in the same way as Shakespeare and church builders, “anonymously, needing no thanking or

[45] *Orlando*, 53.

naming" (*Orlando* 64). Such a way of life seems to him so admirable that he wants to enjoy it this very moment. This idea, coming as quick as a bullet, is a certain kind of epiphany which shifts his mental development to a higher level of maturity. But the journey, before this idea is brought to fruition, is immensely long. The poem grows very slowly; in certain periods its scope is cut down by constant crossing out, at times the work on the poem is interrupted for entire decades as if it were never to be resumed again. Her manuscript, marked by the initial date of 1586, bears all the traces of Orlando's life "sea-stained, blood-stained, travel-stained" (*Orlando* 153). It reflects his/her quest, groping, uncertainties and doubts, but also expresses something enduring about his/her personality and values that survived all the changes of historical periods as well as the change of sex.

Even at those times when he/she is not working on the poem Orlando is troubled by the dilemmas of literary expression. These are the issues central to Virginia Woolf, however, not to Orlando or Vita Sackville-West. In Turkey, after her transformation into a woman, Orlando ponders on the inadequacy of human means of communication to express certain feelings. The artist employs his/her unconventional method of expression and risks misunderstanding and ridicule as a result rather than keep his/her experience to himself/herself. For instance, when Orlando, enthralled by the beauty of nature repeatedly expresses her feeling by an exclamation: "How good to eat!" because "the gipsies have no word for 'beautiful,'"[46] she provokes not only laughter of the gipsy youth but also alarm of the old Rustum el Sadi, as it is obvious that she does not share his opinion that nature is cruel. Her view of reality is the perspective of "someone who doubts [...] someone who believes neither in sheep-skin nor basket; but sees [...] something else" (*Orlando* 92).

[46] *Orlando*, 90.

The realization that reality is complex and multilayered goes hand in hand with the shaping of the artist's personality. The opportunities to explore the various aspects of reality are open to Orlando when she as a woman returns from Turkey to England of the eighteenth century and has the chance to see in practise the consequences of her marvellous alteration. Woolf's idea to change Orlando's sex produces the ideal point of view from which the author records the position of women in society. It allows her to compare two different kinds of experience her hero/heroine as an individual went through. Orlando, in her thirties, has almost two-hundred years of experience as a male, and finds out that she still is the same human being as she was before the change. From the point of view of society, however, she became someone who cannot be permitted the same freedom of movement, expression and thought as a man. The idea of comfort, opulence and a good position in society is unacceptable for her "if it meant conventionality, meant slavery, meant deceit, meant denying her love, fettering her limbs, pursing her lips, and restraining her tongue" (*Orlando* 104).

The England of the eighteenth century, however, constitutes, for the female Orlando, a much more favourable atmosphere than the nineteenth century. Harper succinctly conveys Woolf's depiction of the 'spirit' of that time: "capable, confident, humane, practical, extroverted."[47] Nevertheless, Orlando's active exploration of social life ends in her discovery that social conversation of salons is rather empty, finding out that she heard nothing new there "but what Pippin [her spaniel] might have said" (*Orlando* 126). That is why she rightly asks: "Is this what people call life?" (*Orlando* 125). Virginia Woolf poses a similar question in her essay "Modern Fiction" when she criticizes the writing of her contemporaries, Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, who focus on superficial aspects of life in their novels. In *Orlando*, it seems to be no coincidence

[47] Harper, 187.

that this existential question is connected with "Tuesday, the 16th of June, 1712." It is the only specific date Woolf mentions in chapter four, and in Harper's view, she implies that the setting of Joyce's *Ulysses* takes place exactly 192 years later.[48] And so in the year 1904, as well as in 1712, whether in Wool's present day or in ours, people search for the answer to the same questions which concern the life of the individual and humanity in general.

Orlando's quest to find answers to the questions of what love, friendship and truth are, in short, what people call life, is what Woolf metaphorically calls "a fin passing far out" and "soberly and accurately, the oddest affair" (*AWD* 101). To Orlando, getting to the bottom of this most peculiar affair, seems only possible through meeting with the greatest personalities of the literary world, among whose ranks in the eighteenth century numbered Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison and Jonathan Swift. Despite Orlando's position of a rich hostess and patron, she is, in the eyes of these men of letters, merely a woman who "knows very well that, though a wit sends her his poems, praises her judgment, solicits her criticism, and drinks her tea, this by no means signifies that he respects her opinions, admires her understanding, or will refuse, though the rapier is denied him, to run her through the body with his pen" (*Orlando* 137). Orlando's contact with these poets and writers is significant to her growth as an artist. In addition to that they "taught her the most important part of style, which is the natural run of the voice in speaking" (*Orlando* 136) they took away her illusion of their divine genius. Orlando recognizes that these men of genius are not very much different from other mortals.

[48] The events of Joyce's *Ulysses* unfold on Thursday 16th June 1904. 16th June 1712 was not Tuesday; according to the Julian calendar, it was Monday. Under the Gregorian calendar, which was adopted in the British Empire in 1752, however, this date would correspond to Thursday. For the information on the particular days (Monday and Thursday in the Julian and Gregorian calendars respectively) see: <http://5ko.free.fr/en/year.php?y=1712>.

Their genius does not radiate from them incessantly. "Rather it resembles the lighthouse in its working, which sends one ray and then no more for a time; [...] and when the dark spell is on them men of genius are, it is said, much like other people" (*Orlando* 133). If they flashed perpetually, we would be able to see everything plain and there would be nothing to search for. But this would mean the end of a meaningful life. Guiguet says that "Shakespeare and Sir Thomas Browne, Pope, Addison and Swift survive not through what they found but because they sought, and because we follow their footsteps on man's eternal quest."[49]

In a like manner to Orlando's own personality, her poem "The Oak Tree" undergoes changes which reflect her more and more mature self. The awareness of her feminine identity leads Orlando to ponder on the alterations she should make in the first stanzas of her poem. Here the poem is a fabric, which Woolf uses as a means to demonstrate the development of the poet's creative imagination. Due to the fact that in the eighteenth century she writes this poem as a mature woman, no longer as the youth she used to be in the Elizabethan period, it is clear that her subject and style must be different. First of all, she finds out, when she, after a longer hiatus, returns to the poem again, that she let herself be seduced by impressive, yet cheap clichés. These are mainly devilish temptations of the letter 'S' and the termination 'ing' since "the present participle is the Devil himself" (*Orlando* 111). Because the [poet's] "words reach where others fall short," (*Orlando* 111) then their shape must embody the poet's thoughts.

According to Froula, "The Oak Tree" rewrites Milton's Eden, that garden of masculine universalism wherein dwell "He for God only, she for God in him."[50] Here Woolf touches upon the subject of androgyny which she elaborates in *A Room of One's Own* when she muses on the unity of the spirit in connection with the creation of art. She

[49] Guiguet, 276.
[50] See Christine Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avantgarde : War, Civilization, Modernity*. (New York : Columbia University Press, 2005), 186.

suggests that neither the purely masculine nor purely feminine mind can create great art because they are limited by the narrow boundaries of one or the other sex. Woolf strongly believes that only the androgynous mind, which does not discriminate between a specifically masculine thinking from a specifically feminine thinking "gives birth to all kinds of life" (*A Room of One's Own*, 91).

The sexual identity of some characters in the novel is obscure. In particular, this concerns Sasha, when Orlando catches a glimpse of her for the very first time, the Archduchess Harriet / Archduke Harry and finally also Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. By this obscurity, Woolf indicates that despite the differences between the two sexes "there nevertheless exists no firm demarcation between proper male or female behaviour."[51] Thus, even though it may seem incredible, "a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman" (*Orlando* 168). The human mind is capable of encompassing all perceptions that are frequently attributed exclusively to one sex or the other. It is especially true of the artist, whose mind is more perceptive than the mind of people in general. Rosenthal explains the term 'androgynous' in the sense Woolf uses it in *A Room of One's Own*. He stresses that it is "a metaphor for that luminous, creative intelligence, unhindered by parochialisms and grievances which is capable of producing great works of art."[52] In *Orlando* Woolf constantly refers to Shakespeare because she believes that "if ever mind was incandescent, unimpeded, [...] it was Shakespeare's mind" (*A Room of One's Own*, 52). Rosenthal points out that this metaphor [androgyny] "cannot be generalized into establishing Woolf's 'androgynous vision.'"[53] If it is taken out of its context, then far from illuminating Woolf's fiction it distorts its meaning.

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[51] Rosenthal, 136.
[52] Ibid., 228.
[53] Ibid., 36. Rosenthal discusses the popular view of androgyny in the late 1970s, the time his book was published. He objects to a simplified feminist view of Woolf's conception of androgyny. He argues that

In spite of the fact that a work of art comes into being in seclusion and contemplation, the artist cannot escape the influence of the day and age and its demands and expectations. In the fourth chapter of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf discusses the ways female writers of the nineteenth century got to grips with the requirements and prejudice of the age and what effects this had on their work.[54] Whether a female writer creates her work with rancour and aversion to the world or if she submits to it against her will, her creative vision becomes distorted as a result. The nineteenth century is not favourable to Orlando in terms of providing suitable conditions for creative effort, becoming alien to a society which requires all its citizens to live in conventional bonds of marriage. Damp and a dark cloud are Woolf's metaphors for the all-encompassing despair which the author attributes to the Victorian period. Damp spurs an enormous and gruelling fertility of everything, from vegetables to people, afflicting literature as well, making the works grow into bulky volumes. The dark cloud does not allow people to show their feelings and speak openly. 'The spirit of the age' brings the idea of a wedding ring to Orlando's mind, the absence of which, in her case, causes creative blockage. The necessary 'transaction' between her and 'the spirit of the age' is brought about through her marriage to Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. In this way, she makes peace with the age, gaining freedom at the same, which she needs to do her work. It is an

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"the hunters of androgyny doggedly chase the metaphor through all of Woolf's fiction, hacking out new patterns of meaning as they go."

[54] In the nineteenth century women writers had to face derision, patronisation and open hostility on the part of men. Their novels were in most cases bad because they constantly tried to come to terms with criticism and make concessions to external authority. Woolf argues that only the novels of Jane Austen, Emily and Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot are good. Only Jane Austen and Emily Brontë wrote as women do not as men do, devoid of any foreign matter. George Eliot failed to shape her own mode of expression. Instead, she adopted the style of the great male novelists and tried to conceal her identity by assuming a male pseudonym. Woolf also compares Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë, claiming that Jane Austen wrote without embitterment and animosity towards the world. Thus her novels have greater integrity than the novels of Charlotte Brontë who longed for better ways of developing her abilities. This rancour marked her novels.

"extremely happy position" because "she need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself" (*Orlando* 174).

But the pursuit of the selfsame phantom preoccupies Orlando's mind at the end of the Victorian period, just as it does Woolf's mind many years later: "So the days pass and I ask myself sometimes whether one is not hypnotized, as a child by a silver globe, by life; and whether this is living" (*AWD* 138). Not even a look out of the window at reality – grass, sky, birds and people – gives Orlando a satisfactory answer to the question: "Life, life, what art thou? Light or darkness, the baize apron of the under footman or the shadow of the starling on the grass?" (*Orlando* 177). Both logic and imagination lead to the conclusion that the only honest answer is: "alas, we don't know" (*Orlando* 177). According to Harper, this too seems a liberating epiphany. There is no need to search for ultimate answers; it is more meaningful to occupy ourselves with the immediate realities.[55]And if the author, at such a moment, shouts "done!" with regard to her work, as Orlando did, then the future of the poem is decided, since no artist creates his work only for himself. Orlando is no longer obsessed by the same desire of fame as she used to be three hundred and fifty years ago, when she, as a youth, sought Nick Greene's advice. And yet, she wishes her poem to be printed, for the nature of the poem itself, as a work of art, is realized only when the work is published. And so "The Oak Tree" goes through Nick Greene's hands again who, at the end of the nineteenth century, is a professor of literature and a reputable critic. Nevertheless, he still remains true to his critical principles and a deep resentment against "precious conceits and wild experiments" (*Orlando* 182). One perfunctory reading of the poem, while having lunch with Orlando, suffices and he bestows a judgement full of superlatives based primarily on the fact that he finds "no trace in it [...] of the modern spirit" (*Orlando* 183). Here

[55] See Harper, 190.

Woolf hints at the superficiality of criticism, which does not often go beneath the surface of the work and fails to see its depth but "only a birds eye view of the pinnacle of an iceberg. The rest under water" (*AWD* 210). The literary world, in which critics of the Nick Greene type make decisions about the value of a literary work, becomes a farce and works which meet the criteria of such a criticism have very little in common with real life. Orlando finds out that all the fame is immaterial to the act of writing poetry. It may even become a temptation for the author, as Woolf observes after the publication of *Orlando*: "Indeed I am up against some difficulties. Fame to begin with. [...] Now I could go on writing like that – the tug and suck are at me to do it" (*AWD* 138-9). All the honours and public recognition of a literary work belong only to the subsidiary aspects of literature because every work of art is above all a very personal act, "a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice" (*Orlando* 213).

Orlando, who continuously walks through centuries, confirms by her constant search for life, that life is "somehow successive and continuous" (*AWD* 141). As human beings, we find ourselves in this continuity, in every moment, on a precariously "narrow plank" and our survival is "only possible because the past shelters us on one side and the future on another" (*Orlando* 195). The present moment comprises a transient reality which Woolf tries to get hold of, but it perpetually escapes like a wild goose flying out to sea. "Always it flies fast out to sea and always I fling after it words like nets [...]; and sometimes there's an inch of silver--six words--in the bottom of the net. But never the great fish who lives in the coral groves" (*Orlando* 204-205). And yet it is not a futile effort. After finishing the *Waves*, she refers to having "netted that fin in the waste of water" (*AWD* 169). At the end of the last chapter of *Orlando*, the present moment is defined by the twelfth stroke of midnight on Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen hundred and Twenty Eight. The flying wild goose, which Woolf associates this

particular moment with, symbolizes the artist's never ending endeavour to capture reality.

## 5. *The Pargiters*: An Experiment with a Novel-Essay

In chapter three, I have outlined some links between *Orlando* and *The Years*. *Orlando* contains a story, but there are also frequent digressions and commentaries which are mainly concerned with the problem of literary expression of complex and elusive reality. The essay parts go hand in hand with the story and respond to it without disturbing the unbridled style and spontaneity of this novel. In spite of the fact that Woolf, throughout her career, tended to avoid the depiction of reality from the outside, it seems that *Orlando* provided an impetus for her to ponder on a different form of the novel than the one of *Mrs Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse*. In her diary she deliberates: "I think even externality is good; some combination of them ought to be possible" (*AWD* 139). She, however, believes that it is necessary to steer clear of the "appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional" (*AWD* 139).

It was characteristic of Woolf's creative effort that, upon finishing her last work, she was already conceiving what form her acute vision of reality would assume in her next literary endeavour. Writing from an external perspective, which she applied in *Orlando*, must have inevitably been alternated by an immersion in the depths of timeless internality in *The Waves*. After *The Waves* she felt the need to express her vision out of

external chronological facts of reality, which meant, for her, to "give ordinary waking Arnold Bennett life the form of art" (*AWD* 208).

Woolf's idea of a novel-essay grew out of her plan to write "a sequel to *A Room of One's Own* – about the sexual life of women: to be called *Profession for Women* perhaps" (*AWD* 165-6).[56] On October 11, 1932, Woolf called the projected essay "*The Pargiters: An Essay based upon a paper read to the London / National Society for Women's Service*."[57] Shortly after she changed the title to read "A Novel-Essay." The diary entry of November 2, 1933, somewhat testifies to this ambitious project and the enthusiasm with which she started to put it into effect. The onset of the book is accompanied by a similar euphoria to that she experienced when working on *Orlando*:

> It's to be an Essay-Novel, called *The Pargiters* – and it's to take in everything, sex, education, life etc: and come, with the most powerful and agile leaps, like a chamois, across precipices from 1880 to here and now. That's the notion anyhow, and I have been in such a haze and dream and intoxication, declaiming phrases, seeing scenes, as I walk up Southampton Row that I can hardly say I have been alive at all, since 10th October. (*AWD* 189)

The radical conception of a novel-essay which Woolf had in mind at that time was to encompass a series of fictional parts alternating with essays. Fictional parts were to incorporate significant ideas about feminism, politics and education. Each fictional

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[56] It is a note made on 20 January 1931. But in May 1934 Woolf made a marginal note: "This is *Here and Now*, I think." *Here and Now* was the second title (of nine altogether) for *The Years*. It did not refer to *Three Guineas* as Leonard Woolf falsely assumed in his edition of *A Writer's Diary*.

[57] This paper was a Speech delivered on 21 January 1931. A much reduced version was published as "Profession for Women" in *The Death of the Moth*. See Leaska, Mitchell A. Introduction. *The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of The Years*. By Virginia Woolf. (New York: New York Public Library, 1977), xxvii.

illustration would be followed by an essay explaining how women novelists embody certain principal ideas from real life in their works. Woolf's preoccupation with facts is very well described in a passage from the "First Essay" of *The Pargiters*:

> This novel, "The Pargiters," moreover is not a novel of vision, but a novel of fact. It is based upon some scores – I might boldly say thousands – of old memories. There is scarcely a statement in it that cannot be verified, if anybody should wish so to misuse their time. I hope that I am not making an empty boast if I say that there is not a statement in it that cannot be verified. (*The Pargiters* 9)

This work, similarly to *Orlando*, sprang from an immediate inspiration but kept neither its initial rapid rate nor its intended form of a novel-essay. Within two months, "by 19 December 1932, she had written what she considered to be the first draft of 'Chapter One' consisting of six Essays and five fictional 'extracts' – that is, the complete first draft of what was to become the 1880 section of *The Years*."[58] On February 2, 1933, when Woolf revised this first chapter, she left out the interchapters [the Essays] and an appendix of dates. She never implemented the intended appendix and as far as the essays are concerned, it is clear that she used a part of their content of ideas in the text of *The Years*, not in a didactic form, however, but in a poetic rendering of the dilemmas of the characters. It thus seems that On February 2, 1933, Woolf abandoned the idea of the "Novel-Essay" once and for all, and focused all her effort on the form of the novel, in which fact and vision are not separated but permeate into the world of uncertainties and disarray, where Woolf's characters struggle for a gradually better understanding of their own selves and the meaning of their existence.

[58] See Leaska, Introduction, xvii.

The entries in *A Writer's Diary*, which follow after the aforementioned date, show how the novel grew and what problems the author encountered. They also reveal Woolf's gradual realisation that the extensive factual materials, which she gathered together and planned to incorporate into the essay parts, could be in some conflict with her artistic intention. In spite of the fact that the vision of this unconventional form did not survive the author's first critical revision, it is a very intriguing illustration of her attempt to join analytical and creative thinking into a single whole. She envisioned the work to encompass the state and development of British society and the impact of the external situation on the lives of members of one middle-class family from 1880 to Woolf's present day. In the diary entries from 1932 we can observe Woolf's uneasiness over the precarious situation of the world and the state of British society. Her feelings described in the entry from 25 May 1932 appear to precede what she tried to express in *The Pargiters* and subsequently in *The Years*:

> Wonder how a year or so perhaps is to be endured. Think, yet people do live; can't imagine what goes on behind faces. All is surface hard; myself only an organ that takes blows, one after another; the horror of the hard raddled faces in the flower show yesterday: the inane pointlessness of all this existence. [...] I saw all the violence and unreason crossing in the air: ourselves small; a tumult outside: something terrifying: unreason – shall I make a book out of this? It would be a way of bringing order and speed again into my world. (*AWD* 180-1)

When a number of weeks later, she sleeps over a new and "promising novel" (*AWD* 182), we can rightly assume that this particular point does in fact refer to *The Pargiters* because the entire long entry from 13 July 1932 deals with the personality of Joseph Wright, British philologist and editor of *The English Dialect Dictionary*. In *The*

*Pargiters* she devotes almost the entire "Sixth Essay" to this man whom she not only respected but felt a strong emotional bond to: "Odd how rare it is to meet people who say things that we ourselves could have said. Their attitude to life much our own" (*AWD* 183). Leaska believes that "Joseph Wright, the word 'parget' from his *Dictionary*, and the novel's first title were all somehow intimately connected in Virginia Woolf's mind – and that she was apparently fully conscious of the implication of calling her fictional family by that name."[59]

The word 'pargitter' does not appear in Wright's *Dictionary*. But there is a verb 'parget' which according to Wright means "to plaster with cement or mortar, esp. to plaster the inside of a chimney with cement made of cowdung and lime."[60] Marcus calls attention to the fact that in Wright's definition 'pargeter' is also "one who covers up the truth or tells lies. Woolf's use of the word as a surname suggests both a moral and physical ambivalence in a novel about the patriarchal family, perhaps a combination of whitewash and filth, a true 'whited sepulchre'."[61] This name expresses behaviour and attitudes of the Pargiter family towards the world and one another. People among whom normal communication fails and natural human relationships are supplanted by pretence and conventions are "themselves pargeters and teach their children to be."[62]

This is a portrayal of social conditions in which two or three preceding generations of women lived. These are the conditions from which the situation of Woolf's contemporaries arose; women who tried to earn their own living in the professions still had to face various kinds of limitations and prejudice in the 1930s. For

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[59] Ibid., xvi.

[60] Ibid., xiv. Leaska quotes 2 Vol iv, M-Q, *English Dialect Dictionary* (6 vols) ed Joseph Wright (London: Henry Frowde 1903) p 423.

[61] Jane Marcus, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy.* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 57.

[62] Leaska, xix.

this reason, Woolf in the "First Essay" of *The Pargiters* stresses historical context and explains to her fictitious audience, which she invented in order to establish contact with the reader, why she resolved to read a selection of chapters from her novel, she is in process of writing. The illustration of more than fifty-year-old history of one of the typical English families indicates her intention "to represent English life at its most normal, most typical, and most representative" (*The Pargiters* 9). Her selection of the chapter "which deals with the Pargiters in the year 1880" should "provide that perspective which is so important for the understanding of the present" (*The Pargiters* 9). The world which Woolf depicts is the world of male authority. Its pervasiveness is perceived by all members of the Pargiter family, especially by daughters.

> [*"Where's Eleanor?"*] And [*where is everybody?" he asked*] <[*where have*]> what[s] [*everybody*] <have you all been> up to? he asked; looking about him [*with the*] [*in that shrewd authoritative manner which*] <with> small shrewd authoritative eyes [*which his*] children [*admired,*] <both> respected & feared. One might take in Mama; but it was no use [*telling*] <trying that on> Papa [*a lie. And*] It was his habit to require a full account of his children's conduct.[63] (*The Pargiters* 13)

Woolf analyses some manifestations of sexual polarization and their effects upon young women in England in 1880. She describes the Pargiter drawing room where three healthy girls are practically imprisoned, sitting round the tea table or peeping out of windows at unknown young men.

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[63] In the Introduction Leaska, provides an explanation of editorial symbols and procedures. See xxiii:
[word] = a reading editorially supplied.
[*word*] = a deletion editorially restored.
<word> = an insertion made by Virginia Woolf.
<[*word*]> = an insertion deleted but editorially restored.
Leaska describes the difficulty when transcribing the manuscript. He says that Woolf did not always cross out the entire phrase or clause she intended to cancel and so he treated the inferred deletions as actual ones.

> Here came a hansom <jingling past> ... was it going to stop? [...] No it went on. It stopped [*three doors down across the road*] <at the house next door>. [...] Milly came and stood beside her sister & they watched a young man in a top hat get out & stretch his hand up to pay the driver. '[You mustn't] <Dont> be caught looking –' said [*Elen*] Eleanor. (*The Pargiters* 18)

These scenes depict the endless boredom and hopelessness which looms over the female members of the Pargiter family. These are the results of the assertion of male authority, excluding daughters from any meaningful education which would enable them to make their own decisions and become financially independent. Such an atmosphere causes unhealthy rivalry among sisters over an available male, forces them to conceal thoughts from one another, makes liars of them and deforms their character. Exposed to this influence from childhood, they have to bear its consequences for their entire lives, as it is demonstrated by the subsequent stories of The Pargiter children in the novel *The Years*. An example of this is an episode in which the ten-year old Rose encounters a sexual pervert one night outside the walls of her parental home. The requirement to maintain proper ways of conduct does not, however, allow any talk about taboo subjects. Rose, therefore, cannot confide in anyone about her traumatizing experience which lingers in her mind in the form of a recurrent image of the animal-like face of a lustful man.[64]

The world in which there is a lack of communication among the family members is the world of confused values, and has pernicious effects not only on young women but

[64] In *The Years* (35), Woolf adds another important aspect regarding Rose's experience. Rose has a profound feeling of guilt and for some reason she believes that she must lie about the face she had seen. Roger Poole explains the feelings of guilt Woolf talked about when she was supposedly insane. She was sexually interfered with by her two half-brothers Gerald (from 1888 up to 1895) and George Duckworth (from 1895 to 1904). Woolf unites the two Duckworths in a common image: the horrible face of animal lust. See Roger Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 23-38.

also on young men, who are taught to perpetuate the value system by which they were brought up. Woolf illustrates this fact with the example of Edward Pargiter whose inner life is torn between two extremes. On the one hand, there is the respect for tradition, imparted to him by his headmaster Dr. Bealby which leads him to strive for a Fellowship, and in so doing conform to his father's expectations. For Edward, it is a way to achieve "the sterner and more robust virtues – fortitude, self-reliance, intrepidity, devotion to the common weal; readiness for united action and self-sacrifice" (*The Pargiters* 77). On the other hand, Edward feels the need to fulfil his sexual desire, which aroused by reading *The Antigone* takes the shape of sexual fantasies focused on his cousin, Kitty Malone. Influenced by his conviction that erotic stimuli ought to be overcome by self-control, he idealizes Kitty, knowing her only superficially, to an abstraction. Therefore he tries to express his immature ideas of love in a poem, entitled "Persephone", which is not a praise of Kitty's assets, however, but his own virtues.

The system of values which was implanted in middle class girls differed greatly from the system of values which shaped boys. Woolf points out that despite the fact that in 1880 middle class women could have been educated at Cheltenham College under Miss Dorothea Beale, the aim of this form of education was different and, in essence, helped to maintain the existing patriarchal system. "The founders of this college and day school for girls were anxious to make it clear that their aim was to develop in the pupils character and fitness for the duties of later life." These included "those responsible duties which devolve upon her as a wife, mother, mistress and friend, the natural companion and helpmeet of man"[65] (*The Pargiters* 78).

[65] Leaska, 78, notes that in this passage Woolf quotes from Elizabeth Raikes *Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham*.

*The Pargiters: The Novel-Essay Portion of The Years* was published for the very first time in 1977. Making this unfinished work available in published form gives us an opportunity to explore Woolf's critical and creative thinking, by comparing the fictional specimens with their immediate analysis and interpretation. The "Essays" indicate which dominant ideas led the author to the selection of her material for the fictional portions and what correlations there exist between guiding ideas and motives of individual scenes. In the "Fifth Chapter," for instance, Woolf describes a scene, in which Kitty Malone, daughter of an Oxford don, pays a visit to her friend Nell, a fellow student taking history lessons from Miss Craddock. Nell wants to become a doctor. Kitty, who is accustomed to conduct by the rules of decorum, is startled by a friendly atmosphere, unaffected relationships, tolerance and mutual respect among the members of Sam Hughes' family.

> She had never met people like them before. Dad, Mrs Hughes called him dad, was an Oxford don – or something of the kind – at any rate he lectured & taught undergraduates [...]; he ate like a working man; he was a working man; he had no manners at all; he was far the nicest man she had ever met. (*The Pargiters* 132)

A prototype for the character of Sam Hughes is Dr. Joseph Wright, the great dialect scholar. Woolf writes about his life and opinions in the "Sixth Essay" but some facts of his life are also mentioned in the "Fifth Essay," where she describes Alice's[66] father, as seen by Kitty: "His opinion of women was as high as Dr. Andrews' was low. [...] He was not polite. He did not pick up her handkerchief, or tread upon it. He never pinched her knee. He talked to her as frankly as he talked to a man" (*The Pargiters* 127). He

[66] In the "Fifth Essay" the character of Alice is in fact Nell of the "Sixth Essay".

talked about the importance of women earning their livings. He said: “And you women are a great deal more important in the future, than we men” (*The Pargiters* 127).

It is inconsequential that Wright’s personality is concealed in the “Fifth Essay” and in the “Fifth Chapter” under various different names (Hughes, Brook, Gabbit). In the manuscript from which *The Pargiters* has been transcribed, names are changed many times not only within a chapter but also in a single paragraph. Virginia Woolf admired and respected Joseph Wright mainly because he did not merely talk about his views but resolutely put them into practise. Woolf describes Kitty’s feelings when comparing Jo [*seph*], Sam Hughes’ son with young men she made acquaintance with, in the circle of her father’s friends: “she felt physically convinced that if Jo Hughes liked her, he would [*kiss her*;] <tell her so in plain English;>” (*The Pargiters* 133). These ideas Woolf puts into Kitty’s mind are based on her knowledge of Joseph Wright. Wright proposed to his future wife in a way which was unusual in his day and age. In a letter he described his ideal of marriage: “It is my greatest ambition that you shall *live*, not merely exist; and live too in a way that not many women have lived before” (*The Pargiters* 155).

The change in the conception of the whole work and its fundamental shortening in the final version of the novel *The Years* meant that scenes originally written with broader explicitness were rendered in a more concise way or merely implicitly. *The Years* contain only vestiges of “a torrent of fact” (*AWD* 190) which Woolf delighted in for about two months before she decided to leave her former project. Because the explanatory essays are missing in *The Years* and the individual chapters of *The Pargiters* have not been taken over in their entirety and incorporated in the first chapter of *The Years*, some remarks and unspoken thoughts may not be always clear. We can find such an example in the “First Chapter” of *The Pargiters* and the first chapter of *The Years*. Both describe the same scene where Colonel Pargiter informs his daughters that he met

an old friend Burke (in *The Pargiters* it is Blake) at the Club who asked him, in the Colonel's own words "to bring one of you to dinner" as his son Robin (Roger in *The Pargiters*) is back home on leave. In *The Years* Woolf describes how these Colonel's words are perceived by Eleanor: "Eleanor, sitting on her low chair, saw a curious look first on Milly's face, then on Delia's. She had an impression of hostility between them" (*The Years*, 15). The reason why this idea crossed Eleanor's mind may not be immediately clear. In *The Pargiters* Woolf provides an answer:

> She knew [*instan*] as if the <y> [words] had spoken, what was passing through their minds. "[...] [*I want to meet Roger*.] <Only one of us is asked.> Which of us is it to be?" They [*scarcely*] <It is true that neither of them> knew Roger Blake <except as the son of their parents old friends,> but he was a young man & in their circle young men were rare. (*The Pargiters* 15)

Further details regarding this issue can be found in the "Fifth Essay": "The chance of marriage was, moreover, precarious. For as Lady Lovelace has pointed out, there was in the eighties a shortage of the unattached male" (*The Pargiters* 110).

The fact that the unfinished novel-essay was published allows us to observe creative thinking of Virginia Woolf at the moment of composition. The deleted and restored words, substitutions, marginal notes,[67] unfinished sentences and a variety of sentences with the same meaning occur in the fictional chapters to the greatest extent. All of these give evidence of Woolf's continual search for such an expression which would best convey her understanding and perception of reality.

[67] Leaska puts the marginal notes in Woolf's manuscript at the bottom of a page. He also includes Woolf's faulty arithmetic. For example, when subtracting 63 (the age of Kitty's mother Mrs Malone) from 1880 (the year Woolf set her story in) she arrives at a wrong number of 1827 (as the date of birth of Mrs Malone). When adding 21 (Kitty's age in 1880) she gets 1848 (as the year when Mrs Malone was 21). Woolf compares the social situation of Kitty's mother, 21-year old, in 1848 with the conditions in society in 1880.

# 6. *The Years*: The Problem of Combining Fact and Vision

In spite of the fact that the former conception of *The Pargiters* as a novel-essay did not survive the initial process of revision, Woolf's struggle for form continued until the completion of *The Years* in 1936. This novel, which in contrast with the preceding novel, *The Waves*, is based on a real historical and social situation, is not a conventional realistic portrayal of the lives of three generations of one English middle-class family. Woolf's intention was "to give the whole of the present society – nothing less: facts as well as the vision. And to combine them both. I mean, *The Waves* going on simultaneously with *Night and Day*. Is this possible?" (*AWD* 197). The following entries in her diary indicate how the problem of combining fact and vision gradually assumed more specific forms and how this process was reflected in the suggested titles of the work: *The Pargiters*; *Here and Now*; *Music*; *Dawn*; *Sons and Daughters*; *Daughters and Sons*; *Ordinary People*; *The Caravan*; *Other People's Houses*; *The Years*. The change from *The Pargiters* to *Here and Now* shows the author's effort to emphasize the vision: "Suddenly in the night I thought of *Here and Now* as a title for the Pargiters. I think it better. It shows what I'm after and does not compete with the Herries Saga, the Forsyte Saga and so on" (*AWD* 211). Naremore sees the conflict of the world of vision and the world of fact as "a profound conflict between the inner, instinctive needs of the psyche" which Woolf presents as more or less unchanging "and the outer lineaments of the society (which do change)."[68]

The form of the novel, reflecting Woolf's endeavour to combine fact and vision, demonstrates the extent to which she succeeded in joining the "external and the internal"

[68] See an essay by James Naremore, "Nature and History in *The Years*" in Freedman, Ralph (Ed.). *Virginia Woolf*: *Revaluation and Continuity. A Collection of Essays*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 241-2.

(*AWD* 237), in conveying the "I and the not I; the outer and the inner" (*AWD* 259) and "the different strata of being" (*AWD* 230). In the diary entry of October 16, 1934, Woolf ponders on the ways of developing different "strata or layer" which should be balanced: "one strata or layer can't be developed intensively, as I did I expect in *The Waves*, without harm to the others" (*AWD* 258). These strata or layers Woolf develops into "upper air scenes" or those which go beneath the surface, the submerged scenes.

An example of a submerged scene is the one in which Eleanor comes to visit her brother Morris at his mother-in-law's house. It is the summer of 1911 and a few moths fly into her room through the open window. William Whatney sleeps in the room next door; he is the man between whom and Eleanor an affection of a kind was formed in the past. Now that Eleanor's father was dead, in her mid-fifties, she has a feeling that her life just begins. "Things can't go on for ever, she thought. Things pass, things change, she thought, looking up at the ceiling. And where are we going? Where? Where? . . ." (*The Years* 172). She does not have an answer to these questions. Like the moths, instinctively drawn to the light, Eleanor's mind is drawn by a possibility of another existence, different from the one she used to live in, devoting herself entirely to one or another of the members of her family. Her questions, however, end in darkness for the time being.

According to Richter, the different 'layers' or 'strata' Mrs Woolf refers to seem to be scenes which echo different levels of consciousness, some of which are placed literally in the open air or in basements.[69] An example of the latter is the scene in which Eleanor, Sara, Maggie, Nicholas and Renny are in the cellar during an air raid. The submerged emotions which are suggested there become obvious as the scene moves upstairs after the raid is over. When an area of taboo emotions is brought to light, it

[69] Richter, 171.

becomes apparent that Nicholas is a homosexual. An example of an upper air scene, which Woolf mentions in the diary entry of October 16, 1935, is a scene set at the end of the First World War in 1918. It describes Crosby, the Pargiter's ex-servant, on her way to the grocer's shop, muttering to herself in rage because she has to clean the bathtub after a roomer of her employers'. She is old and has trouble walking. She hears the sirens wailing and the guns booming in the distance and somebody tells her that the war is over. This, however, means nothing to her for her life will go on in the same way.

The novel has a linear chronology but it does not move evenly through time. It is divided into parts of varying lengths explicitly dated 1880, 1891, 1907, 1908, 1910, 1911, 1913, 1914, 1917, 1918 and 1936. Not even the seasons follow one another in natural sequence. This lack of symmetry is characteristic of *The Years* and expresses the conception of the world without pattern and harmony. Nonetheless, the external fragmentary world contains the seeds of continuity. The seasonal passages reflect a natural cycle and the permanence of life. The preludes, with their lyrical description of the repeating seasons, bring the sense of order and continuity to the fragmented world. Each chapter has a prelude which describes the weather that will prevail throughout. The country scenes, such as the one in the interlude to the chapter "1910" serve as a reminder of the peaceful cycle of days, which cannot be perceived by people in London as it is concealed by the noise of traffic and social life. This natural cycle, despite the bustle of modern life, remains in the people's subconscious as the fabric of eternity. According to Kelley the opening interlude begins a pattern of seasonal unity. It also contains the human pattern, the suggestion of uncertainty and frequent alternation between fact and vision.[70] An uncertain spring, the weather of which, "perpetually changing, sent clouds of blue and of purple flying over the land" (*The Years* 5), suggests that also people's

[70] Kelley, 205.

lives will be full of uncertainties and abrupt changes, and that their vision will be suddenly disrupted by the harsh reality of fact. But the word 'uncertain' also implies the desire of the individual to search for order and stability. And important question that looms not only over the people who belong to Eleanor's generation, is uttered by Eleanor who wonders about a 'pattern' to life:

> Does everything then come over again a little differently? she thought. If so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? . . . a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible? The thought gave her extreme pleasure: that there was a pattern. But who makes it? Who thinks it? (*The Years* 297)

An underlying motif of permanence and continuity is maintained in the novel by a structure made up of repetition, echoes, memories, images and allusions. Identical images, a tone of a scene's emotion, feelings, thoughts and parts of a dialogue repeat but never entirely the same and give a sense of the passage of time. In this way Woolf wanted to suggest that "there is no break, but a continuous development, possibly a recurrence of some pattern [...]. And the future was gradually to dawn."[71] The long first chapter "1880" describes the lives of the Pargiters at Abercorn Terrace. The following chapters, including the one entitled "1918", recapitulate and explain the earlier chapters. The final chapter, the "Present Day," the longest of them all, is the "submerged side" of the chapter "1880." Woolf makes the following comment: "This last chapter must equal in length and importance and volume the first book: and must in fact give the other side, the submerged side of that" (*AWD* 219). The last chapter of *The Years* evokes a memory of "suppressed emotion" from the first chapter: "The atmosphere of suppressed emotion

[71] These words are taken from a letter to Stephen Spender written on April 7, 1937. See *Leave the Letters Till We're Dead*: *The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Vol. VI: 1936-1941*. Ed. Nigel Nicolson, assist. ed. Joanne Trautmann. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1980), 116.

was distasteful to him. There was nothing that anybody could do, but there they all sat in attitudes of suppressed emotion. [...] There he was cooped up with all these women in an atmosphere of unreal emotion" (*The Years* 37). In the last chapter Delia reveals that Abercorn Terrace had been "Hell." Delia's remark sheds some light on the aforementioned scene from the first chapter.

The repetition of familiar sounds brings back to mind moments of the past and connects them with the present situation. Perhaps, the most frequent sound is the crooning of pigeons: "Take two coos, Taffy" which we encounter in various different pages of *The Years* and we can imagine this sound together with Kitty in 1880 (62); Eleanor in 1891 (94); Sara in 1910 (143); and finally in the "Present Day." At the end of Delia's party, Eleanor calls on the others to listen. Upstairs they are playing 'God save the King' on the gramophone but this song is merely a background to the crooning. Eleanor, Kitty and Edward listen to "Take two coos, Taffy, take two coos ..." (348). These sounds function as an interrupted and rebuilt vision. Also the songs sung by peddlers on the street, a beggar singing, playing of a barrel organ and a woman singing scales bring through their rhythm and repetitive quality an everlasting aspect to life.

Throughout the entire novel spoken sentences and thoughts occur which are sometimes repeated by different characters in various moments and thus their movement through time is expressed. Mrs Pargiter repeatedly shouts on her death bed 'Where am I?' She does not recognize her daughter, Delia, who enters into the room. "'Where am I?' she repeated. For a moment Delia was bewildered too. Where was she? [...] 'What's happening?' she said. 'Where am I?'" (*The Years* 21). When Delia leaves the room she asks herself: 'Where am I?' (*The Years* 23). 'Where am I?' (36) Eleanor asks the same when returning from the frightened Rose, who cannot bring herself to tell her about her encounter with the pervert. Kitty, on her way home from the Robsons, seems to be lost

for a moment: “She forgot where she was” (*The Years* 61). Kitty has the same feeling again in 1914: ‘Where am I?’ (216) Kitty asks when her party is over and she is getting ready to leave for the Castle.

These are not only short sentences which Woolf lets repeatedly reverberate throughout the novel, but they are also more coherent ideas which aim to express the sense of helplessness and uneasiness concerning the present state of society. It is, for example, the idea which Nicholas articulates several times in different situations:

> “I was saying we do not know ourselves, ordinary people; and if we do not know ourselves, how then can we make religions, laws, that –” he used his hands as people do who find language obdurate, “that –”
>
> “That fit – that fit,” she said, supplying him with a word that was shorter, she felt sure, than the dictionary word that foreigners always used. (*The Years* 227)

In *The Years* we also meet with repeating actions and objects. For instance, Milly in 1880 frays the wick of an old-fashioned brass kettle with her hairpin in order to increase the size of the flame, and make the water boil sooner. In 1908, Eleanor does the same thing and her brother Martin says: ‘Damn that kettle’ (124); making nearly the same remark as he did in 1880. A crimson chair with guilt claws[72] appears in different rooms at different times. In 1891 and in 1907 it is in the hall of Digby Pargiter’s house (104, 107, 117) where it has “a look of ceremony”; in a poverty-stricken room in 1910 (134); in 1917 in the drawing-room of Maggie and Renny where it seems “to radiate out

[72] Marcus, 58, notes that in *Moments of Being* Woolf mentions her mother’s chair which strongly resembles the chair with gilt claws in *The Years*. Marcus discusses the meaning of the colours red and gold as signifying sunset, imperialism, blood, sacrifice and love. Red is the colour of calamity but also of fertility. Marcus quotes Woolf who in her essay on Sickert’s painting wrote: “in the eyes of a motorist red is not a colour but simply a danger signal. We shall very soon lose our sense of colour ... colours are used so much as signals now that they will very soon suggest action merely.”

some warmth, some glamour" (231-2); and in the present day in Sara's dingy apartment (252).

Richter expressed an interesting opinion regarding the technique Woolf uses to capture the quality of lived time. The repetition of words and phrases in the same or in a subsequent scene, gives the seemingly random episodes the quality of connected experience. The gaps between the episodes and chapters suggest the blanking-out of some events in the memory and the enduring vividness of others.[73]

The repetition of the same ideas by different individuals may also indicate the endeavour to transcend the narrow limitations of the individual selves in the search for possibilities of communication which might lead to unity.

# 7. *The Years*: The Aspect of Vision in the Search for Pattern

*The Years*, like the other Virginia Woolf's novels, try to depict the constant human desire for the richness of life in the world of uncertainties and confusion which drive people to isolation and destroy the vision. A series of dramatic scenes from the life of three generations of the Pargiters and their friends, not only enables Woolf to create the feeling of "the individual and a sense of things coming over and over again and yet changing" (*AWD* 260), but also to deal with social conditions and their effects on the lives of women in particular. Although society, in the course of more than fifty years which Woolf recounts, meets with indisputable success in its development, some of its values and assumptions remain constant from the Victorian period to the 1930s. The

[73] Richter, 176.

fixed social institutions do not allow equal opportunities for men and women with regard to employment in professions, do not tolerate diversity, whether social or sexual, and maintain the domination of masculine values, which as Woolf demonstrates in *Three Guineas*, ultimately lead to violence, tyranny and war.

The central theme of the novel does not consist, however, in the emphasis on given social conditions and their changes but in their impact on people's inner lives. People relentlessly wage a battle between the conventions, which dictate certain modes of behaviour, and their own natural instincts. In the first chapter there are a number of scenes connected with the funeral of Mrs Pargiter. Woolf observes them through the eyes of Delia Pargiter and shows people being forced into unnatural poses when trying to pretend feelings they do not have.[74] "Some of the women were crying; but not the men; the men had one pose; the women had another" (*The Years* 71). "As for her father he was so stiff and so rigid that she had a convulsive desire to laugh aloud. Nobody can feel like that, she thought" (*The Years* 72). When the coffin is being put into the grave, Delia realizes that the woman lying in that coffin is her mother whom she both loved and hated. When earth drops on the coffin, all of a sudden Delia has a kind of epiphany: "she was possessed by a sense of something everlasting; of life mixing with death, of death becoming life" (*The Years* 72). But the moment of contemplation is interrupted by the clergyman's voice:

> 'We give thee hearty thanks,' said the voice, 'for that it has pleased thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this sinful world –'

[74] In "A Sketch of the Past" (in *Moments of Being*) Virginia Woolf describes the situation when her mother died and she, together with the other children, was taken to her mother's bedroom. When she saw one of the nurses sobbing she felt a desire to laugh and said to herself: 'I feel nothing whatever'. It seems that Woolf's memory of these feelings are embodied in the character of Delia. See *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings.* Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. (New York : Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), 91-2.

> What a lie! she cried to herself. What a damnable lie! He had robbed her of the one feeling that was genuine; he had spoilt her one moment of understanding. (*The Years* 72)

The memories of the lies which flourished beneath the pretended refined manners of the Pargiter family at Abercorn Terrace, remain in the minds of one generation for years. In 1913 Martin tells Crosby, the family's old servant, that he must be off, only to free himself from the discomfort of having to talk to her. This incident reminds him of his childhood at Abercorn Terrace and his father's lies. "It was an abominable system, he thought; family life; Abercorn Terrace. No wonder the house would not let. It had one bathroom, and a basement; and there all those different people had lived, boxed up together, telling lies" (*The Years* 180).

The Pargiter family represents one of the institutions that helped sustain the values of a patriarchal society offering little possibility for the achievement of human ambitions. Most of the characters in the novel feel the "unreality, the invalidity of their experience."[75] In the last chapter, North, the representative of the third generation of the Pargiters, says to himself: "We cannot help each other [...] we are all deformed" (*The Years* 305). An almost total lack of communication among family members is the main cause of this deformation. The sharing of experience is just as problematic in 1936 as it was in 1880. Conversation between people is not real communication when ideas are not exchanged and mutual understanding is not achieved. It is rather a sequence of monologues composed of unfinished sentences without any logical connection. The things that are truly important for the life of an individual are not spoken about in the family. Rose cannot tell anyone about her traumatizing experience with the pervert. In such a world people feel isolated and disoriented. Amid this uncertainty Eleanor asks

[75] See *Leave the Letters Till We're Dead*, 122. In this letter to Stephen Spender from April 30, 1937, Woolf explains to him her conception of the characters in *The Years*.

herself whether life has a "pattern" and if it does where we should search for it. Most of the Pargiters search for this pattern in the world of fact. Edward Pargiter seeks abstract factual truth through the study of the classics, especially *The Antigone* of Sophocles, the translation of which into English brought him fame. He is the type of a scholar who avoids the actual world because he is unwilling to get into conflict with it. Maggie, his cousin, tries to find some order in fact alone. She cannot accept the idea that "the world's nothing but thought ..." (*The Years* 113). This view, in her opinion, does not include the nature, trees and colours, nor her own physical existence. "She had been thinking, Am I that or am I this? Are we one, or are we separate – something of the kind" (*The Years* 113). Sara, with her visionary approach to life, seems to be the opposite of her sister, Maggie. Slightly deformed physically, she does not accept her limitation in the sphere of the inner life, and, in contrast with many characters, she is capable of shaping her vision from the facts of real life. The reality that surrounds her, after the death of her parents, is too depressing: "'In time to come,' [...] 'people, looking into this room – this cave, this little antre, scooped out of mud and dung, will hold their fingers to their noses' – [...] 'and say Pah! They stink!'" (*The Years* 153).

While Sara's 'cave' took shape of a slum apartment, the 'caves' of most of the characters in the novel are symbolic, brought about by the lack of shared communication and the tendency to shut themselves into private worlds which prevent people from becoming close. Despite that, there is a wish to live differently. In 1917 Eleanor asks herself: "When shall we live adventurously, wholly, not like cripples in a cave?" (*The Years* 239). Sara, however, in spite of her handicap and living in a 'cave' of the slum, which make an outsider of her, has the ability to see the much desirable "pattern." She knows that "people always say the same thing" (*The Years* 239). To say the same things

means to want the same things. This repetition itself is part of the vision which is a sudden insight into truth.

Sara, nevertheless, is not the only visionary outsider in the novel. Eleanor and Nicholas are not just able to perceive life with sensitivity but also share mutual understanding. According to Naremore, their visionary ability is a result of the fact that "they are both outsiders."[76] Nicholas Pomjalovsky, called Brown, because of pronunciation, is a foreigner and homosexual. Eleanor is one of those "daughters of educated men" which is a term used by Woolf in *Three Guineas* to describe middle-class women. Eleanor and Nicholas are capable of transcending cultural, social and sexual barriers when they meet for the first time. Nicholas expresses an idea and Eleanor supplies an appropriate word:

> 'I was saying,' he went on, 'I was saying we do not know ourselves, ordinary people; and if we do not know ourselves, how then can we make religions, laws, that –' he used his hands as people do who find language obdurate, 'that –'
>
> 'That fit – that fit,' she said, supplying him with a word that was shorter, she felt sure, than the dictionary word that foreigners always used. (*The Years* 227)

Woolf uses this example to show that communication between people is possible because as Nicholas said: "We all think the same things; only we do not say them" (*The Years* 227). An expressed idea becomes specific the moment the siren wails out and Eleanor, Nicholas, Sara, Maggie and Renny go to the cellar where they spend the air raid. After that, Renny expresses the absurdity of war as follows: "I have spent the evening sitting in a coal cellar while other people try to kill each other above my head"

[76] Naremore, 250.

(*The Years* 238). The idea of the new world articulated in the toast appears in Eleanor's question addressed to Nicholas: "D'you think we're going to improve?" (*The Years* 238). By this she means to improve ourselves, to live more naturally, better. Nicholas believes that it is possible to implement this vision only in one way:

> 'The soul – the whole being,' he explained. He hollowed his hands as if to enclose a circle. 'It wishes to expand; to adventure; to form – new combinations?'
>
> 'Yes, yes,' she said, as if to assure him that his words were right.
>
> 'Whereas now,' – he drew himself together; put his feet together; he looked like an old lady who is afraid of mice – 'this is how we live, screwed up into one hard little, tight little – knot?'
>
> 'Knot, knot – yes, that's right,' she nodded.
>
> 'Each is his own little cubicle; each with his own cross or holy book; each with his fire, his wife . . .' (*The Years* 238-9)

Nicholas explains by visual demonstration that the soul does not want to be limited by any boundaries. It wants to expand, be adventurous. Now, it is still fearful and timid but, by means of learning, it can become free. Eleanor, when conversing with Nicolas, experiences a kind of gratification which G. E. Moore describes in his *Principia Ethica*.[77] In a precious moment of silence when the others either sleep or are not attending, these two visionary characters focus their joint deliberation on formulating their hopes and ideas of a better world. Eleanor continues in her thinking: "When will this new world come? When shall we be free? When shall we live adventurously,

[77] For the information on the Ideal see G. E. Moore. *Principia Ethica.* (Cambridge University Press, 1962). In his chapter "The Ideal" Moore argues: "By far the most valuable things, which we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness, which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects" (188).

wholly, not like cripples in a cave?" (*The Years* 239). Eleanor does not, however, get any answer.

In the last chapter Woolf does not give any final answers to the questions her characters ask themselves throughout the entire novel. In the "Present Day" her intention is to evoke a certain feeling: "One should be able to feel a wall made out of all the influences; and this should in the last chapter close round them at the party so that you feel that while they go on individually it has completed itself" (*AWD* 258). Moreover, it is not a definitive conclusion but rather a repetition of former topics. One of these is the idea, put forward by Nicholas Brown, that we cannot make laws and religions that fit because we do not know ourselves. This visionary idea resounds at the party of the three generations of the Pargiters and their friends much more emphatically than in 1917, when it was first pronounced. Nicholas, who could not deliver a speech after the air raid in 1917 on the topic of "the new world," now proposes a toast to the human race. Again he talks about the necessity of educating the soul. Woolf lets Nicholas' toast end in a deliberate breaking of his glass. Perhaps she wants to suggest that his vision will soon be shattered as the world is standing on the threshold of another war.

North and Peggy, the representatives of the younger generation of the Pargiters, initially feel alien in this community and look on their old aunts and uncles as if they were pieces of antiquity. Gradually, they intuitively start to grasp that they share with their old relatives the same human feelings of isolation and anxiety. Peggy, first bored and uncertain, pretends reading a book, where she accidentally stumbles upon sentences which express her own feeling of alienation. Drawn into a conversation with Eleanor, she is forced into making comparisons between Eleanor and herself. Although, Peggy had more opportunities in life than Eleanor and became a doctor, she does not feel happier than her. It is Eleanor who claims: "We're happier – we're freer. ..." (*The Years*

310). It is clear that Woolf does not equate professional opportunities with personal fulfilment.

Even though, Peggy does not share Eleanor's optimistic view of life, she has to think about herself, her brother and the meaning of human efforts. When she attempts to formulate her vision of wholeness and harmony in the world, she encounters an unanticipated degree of difficulty:

> 'What's the use?' she said, facing him. 'You'll marry. You'll have children. What'll you do then? Make money. Write little books to make money. . . .' [...] 'You'll write one little book, and then another little book,' she said viciously, 'instead of living . . . living differently, differently.' (*The Years* 314)

North finally understands: "'What you said was true,' he blurted out, '. . . quite true.' It was what she meant that was true, he corrected himself; her feeling, not her words" (*The Years* 339).

Eleanor's vision at the end of the novel is unequivocal: "There must be another life, she thought, sinking back into her chair, exasperated. Not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people [...]. There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken" (*The Years* 343). At the end of her life, Eleanor feels that one's life must be lived in its each and every moment, for the present sinks into the past and the future rises out of the present. She hollowed her hands in order to "enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding." (*The Years* 344). This is all one can do. Eleanor wishes for the wholeness and unity of the world. Woolf does not give an assurance that this unity will be achieved. She, however, lets the sun rise over this human desire.

# Conclusion

Woolf's works I was concerned with in my Thesis are written in such a form which reflects the author's profound interest in new ways of expressing the elusive reality. The free flight of fancy in *Orlando*, the preoccupation with the world of fact in *The Pargiters*, and the strenuous effort to join the world of fact and the world of vision in *The Years*, give evidence of Woolf's relentless search for new forms of expression of a feeling of life that is hard to convey. Human and artistic search lead Woolf to the idea of uncovering various temporal selves, which can be joined in a real self, in which one discovers one's own self and the meaning of one's own search which is, in effect, endless. The creative process is of the same nature; likewise, it is an unceasing search, which Woolf, in *Orlando* expressed by a wild-goose chase. Although such a fleeting reality can never be grasped, the journey to it is intimated and it is the artist's unavoidable task to follow it.

The search for a new form, even in *The Pargiters*, was not futile because it showed Woolf a new direction in her search. The novel *The Years*, which mixes the world of fact with the world of vision, shows how the world of vision penetrates into the world of fact which tries to destroy it, but vision can never be destroyed entirely. Woolf demonstrates this on the visionary characters of Eleanor, Nicholas and Sara. The time, which flows in perpetual repetition of the same or similar activities, grows from the past and continues into the future. Even though, the present day, in 1936, is precarious, much more than in 1880, Eleanor believes that the present day affords the best opportunities for life. This is the reason why she wants to catch the present moment and fill it with the past, the present and the future and live in it her own 'here and now.'

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