

“Nothing is any longer one thing”: Transcending Ideology by Aligning the Self with Nature and Art in Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*

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Abstract

Virginia Woolf’s 1928 novel *Orlando* challenges the very validity of socially constructed ideologies by allowing its titular character to transcend not only the boundaries of physical sex, but also those of time and space. Thus, through the character of Orlando, Woolf explores the farcical nature of ideology by affording them a four-dimensional experience of their own life that exposes their own true nature at the same time as it establishes their connection to capital-N-Nature. Through a close reading of *Orlando*, interspersed with secondary scholarship and framed with reference to three of Woolf’s other works—*To the Lighthouse*, *A Room of One’s Own*, and *Three Guineas*, this essay situates *Orlando*’s four-dimensional phenomena within Woolf’s larger personal philosophy as it is articulated across her body of work.

Keywords: Woolf, Modernism, gender, sex, nature, art

Louis Althusser wrote that the “imaginary relation” between human beings and ideology “is itself endowed with a material existence” (113). Virginia Woolf explores this imaginary relation in her 1928 novel *Orlando* through the use of magic realism. She creates a protagonist who transcends an ideological gender binary that “locks in” men while “locking out” women by portraying their unchanging consciousness as it experiences life in both a “male” and a “female” body¹. The novel’s critique of gendered ideology—

specifically the British patriarchy—largely operates through materiality, especially as it pertains to the estate that Orlando owns as a “man” and loses as a “woman.” Through the differing relationships to privilege that they experience as a result of their sex change, Orlando witnesses the oppression that exists on both sides of the ideological sex divide. This critical perspective, combined with an infatuation with nature that develops during an Ambassadorial stint in Constantinople, allows Orlando to

¹ I tend to place inverted quotation marks around gendered terms throughout this essay simply as a gesture towards breaking down the gender binary as it pertains to bodies. I don’t believe there is such a thing as a “male” or “female” body outside individual self-definition, and so I use this punctuation to avoid biological essentialism.

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transcend time and space by aligning their identity with nature and art rather than nation and ideology. They choose to reject prescribed roles and live authentically as a writer, ultimately embodying the "Society of Outsiders" identified by Woolf in her 1938 essay, *Three Guineas*. While Orlando's status as a British citizen means they will continue to exist within ideology, their disillusionment allows them to find a place within that system that is defined by authenticity rather than hegemony. By aligning its protagonist's identity and lifespan with nature instead of nation, *Orlando's* narrative transcends the trappings of hegemony as its titular character gains a four-dimensional perspective from which they can perceive the constructed, transitory, and oppressive nature of ideology.

Virginia Woolf describes the differences in societal privilege between men and women throughout her 1929 creative essay, *A Room of One's Own*, but the most striking mechanism she uses to do so is the image of the Oxbridge Library. The speaker of her essay attempts to enter the fictional library to do research for a talk on "women and fiction" (3), but is turned away at the door by a "kindly gentleman, who regretted [...] as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction" (7). After "descend[ing] the steps in anger," the speaker reflects on "how unpleasant it is to be locked out" (21) simply because one is a woman. Her ruminations on "the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the poverty and insecurity of the other" (21-2) amount to a means of expressing the relationships that individuals have to ideology—as well as the bodies of knowledge that *create* ideology—based on arbitrary bodily matters including biological sex. To be turned away from a reputable university library is a form of segregation that denies access not only to space, but also to *information*. This ultimately deprives women of the opportunity to learn about, and thereby influence, the very ideologies that deny women access to Oxbridge in the first place. While women might be able to enter the library if they possess either a male companion or a letter of introduction, this gatekeeping reminds them of their position in a society that does not consider them fit to possess knowledge or independence.

However, Woolf's speaker also makes the complementary point that "it is worse perhaps to be locked in" (21), indicating that the men who are granted access to the library might suffer even more than the women who cannot enter. *Orlando* elaborates this theory through its titular character who experiences life first as a "man" before magically transforming into a "woman." Johnson writes that Woolf uses the sex change "as a means of dividing the narrative of national belonging into the privileged experience of full citizenship, on the one hand, and the experience of civic invisibility, on the other" (114). This dynamic theoretically places Orlando within, then without,

the Oxbridge Library in a single lifespan, yet the contrast is not as simple as male privilege versus female exclusion. The novel instead interrogates the relationship between personal and national identity, serving more as a critique of nationalism and ideology than of sex discrimination alone.

Erica L. Johnson argues that Woolf imbues her protagonist with "remarkable fluidity" in order to "consider possible parameters of Englishness from a variety of locations and points of view," resulting in an "increasingly complex if persistently exclusive perspective on national identity" (116). *Orlando* demonstrates that being "locked in" or "locked out" represents only two possible relationships to a larger framework that demands interrogation from an omniscient perspective. To perceive ideology from two perspectives—"man" and "woman"—while retaining a consistent consciousness does not simply amount to two separate, two-dimensional views. Instead, just as the human mind can take two distinct two-dimensional perspectives of the same object and mentally synthesize them into a three-dimensional conception *of* that object, so too can two separate relationships to ideology be synthesized into a three-dimensional view of this abstract concept. Through the character of Orlando, the perspectives of "man" and "woman," as they pertain to societal privilege, combine to form a three-dimensional, inside-out view of the entire structure of ideology.

Woolf exaggerates Orlando's privileges within, and sympathies for, the British Empire when they are a "man" in order to align them with a nation from which they benefit greatly. Johnson writes that "Lord Orlando's sense of national belonging initially appears to stem from every traditional basis for inclusion, from economic to gender to sexual privilege," pointing out too that "His Englishness is so reified, so material, that it is almost parodically so" (116). In the opening line of the novel, the Biographer declares "He—for there could be no doubt of his sex [...] was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters" (11). This deliberate announcement of sex and motivation implies that the Biographer's vision hinges on Orlando's being perceived as a man; they are intended as a portrait of male nobility within British ideology. Additionally, "the dead and mutilated Moor alerts the reader to the history of imperial violence that bolsters Orlando's position" (Johnson 118), aligning the main character with a specific ideology in order to critique that ideology for according privilege to men who benefit from a history of violence. Indeed, the empire-sympathizing Biographer initially aligns himself with Orlando precisely because they are an ideal figure within British ideology, proclaiming that he will be "following after" his subject as they move "From deed to deed, from glory to glory," until they "reach [...] the height of their desire" (12). This gesture towards mutual conquest with a subject who "was cut out precisely for some such career" (12) positions Orlando as exactly what England wants in a "son": an

opportunistic agent who can embody England's desire to constantly expand its power while buying into its patriarchal ideology.

Indeed, the "male" Orlando's assumed permission to occupy British space is their strongest marker of gendered privilege in comparison to their lack of privilege as a "female." Johnson points out that "national space is seen to accommodate male presence and to occlude females" and that "a telling example of how Orlando inhabits national space differently as a man and as a woman is that of Lady Orlando's disinheritance" (113). The relationship between Orlando's perceived sex and their access to material privilege becomes clear when English law officially declares them a woman. When Orlando's sex is "pronounced indisputably, and beyond the shadow of a doubt [...] Female," their property is "desequestered in perpetuity" and will instead be "tailed and entailed upon the heirs male of [Orlando's] body" (187). Permission to legally occupy space is entirely restricted to those who either possess a "male" body or exist in proximity to somebody who does. This "[lines] up the social and economic privileges that provide male bodies with agency in the material world against those denied female bodies" (Johnson 114). Privilege (or lack thereof) manifests in the material advantages that it either confers or denies, while privilege itself stems from another form of materiality: the structure of one's body. The patriarchy with which Orlando initially aligned themselves has colonized their "female" body, assuming ownership and applying its own rules to a formerly independent entity. Despite the fact that "The change of sex [...] did nothing whatever to alter their identity" (*Orlando* 102), a mere change in perceived sex deprives Orlando of the material advantages they took for granted as a "man," transforming them from colonizer to colonized. Their estate is merely the primary signifier of independence and material advantage conferred, then denied, based on their body alone.

Architectural imagery recurs throughout much of Woolf's work and, like Orlando's estate and the Oxbridge Library, often functions as a key device through which she develops literary themes. Judith Allen writes of how "Woolf's narrative and rhetorical strategies enact her aesthetic/political concerns as her readers are challenged to investigate the complex signifying materiality of domestic spaces" (29). Ownership of a home is both an act of colonizing a specific space and a statement of privilege within a given society because it resides on a nationalized landscape that "poses as an objective entity that is in fact inscribed with ideological agendas" (Johnson 117). Domestic spaces therefore project one's place within a social hierarchy onto a landscape that serves as a container for ideology. Houses are more than ideological statements, however: they also signal the identities that possessors of the space wish to project. While Allen's research deals with mantelpieces within homes, these mantelpieces are simply an inner layer

of a structural "Russian-doll-effect" of ideology. If the home is a projection of status onto an ideological landscape, the mantelpiece is a projection of identity—genuine or feigned—within that home. Allen asserts that "mantelpieces reflect the provenance of their houses, the contexts of their settings, the *taste of their owners*" (29; emphasis added). If one is to effectively convey one's status and desired identity within a stratified society, one must have a space to do so and engage in "the complicated process of selecting objects [...] to create/project images" (29). Gina Wisker also observes this trend in Woolf's work, writing that "Woolf's [...] houses resonate with power relations, convention, and family relations which all shape identity and social position" (21). One's position dictates the types of property (if any) that one is allowed to possess while one's personal agenda determines the identities one chooses to project through those spaces.

The signifying role of private mantelpieces also functions in relation to *A Room of One's Own* and the Oxbridge Library. While the library may seem like a "public" space when compared to the privacy of the home, the very fact that some are "locked out" of the library indicates that it too is a private space. The building itself is a status symbol because the assumed "truths" of ideology—signifiers of societal identity—are locked therein. This affords the space a significant degree of prestige, especially in the eyes of those who are denied access. To be "locked out" of the library is to be barred from the ideological "truths" contained within myriad books lining its shelves. Just as mantelpiece items project a desired identity, however, library books are conscious projections of a pre-determined narrative that purveyors of ideology wish to make visible. Allen's assertion that mantelpieces "may be a crucial focal point" (29) can thus be applied to libraries because the very items that occupy the library's shelves are *their* focal point. If the library represents status and prestige, its books are a targeted communication of that prestige. Importantly, Allen states that "Much may be placed on the mantelpiece 'for ever,' but 'nuggets of pure truth' will never make it" (31). This alludes to Woolf's concession in *A Room of One's Own* that she will "never be able to fulfil [...] the first duty of a lecturer—to hand you [...] a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever" (3). Woolf knows that her words are only subjective projections, just like the items placed on mantelpieces and library shelves alike, since they do not convey an objective truth, but rather a curated version of the "truth." People "locked in" the library are unwitting observers of this projection who are so enamoured by their privileged access to books that they do not question the institutions who create, and direct attention towards, specific narratives.

When Orlando is deprived of their estate, it is therefore not a piece of themselves that they lose, but rather the container for their projected status and identity *within*

ideology. They are forced to leave behind their constructed self because that self is housed within their family home. Wisker notes that "Woolf's particular focus is on the ways in which homes, houses, and cities carry the haunting presence of times and people who have left" (9). The presence that remains in Orlando's estate, however, is only the projection of "Lord Orlando." Their consciousness—the *true* Orlando—remains within the only home it has ever had: Orlando's body. Yet even the body assumes specific meanings ideologically, as well as in the subjective minds of others, whether or not its possessor consciously tries to project those meanings. Assigned sex is but one example of a reciprocal projection by and onto the body that people, including Orlando, do not choose.

Even before their transformation, Orlando recognizes the arbitrary nature of the body, realizing that what remains after death is only a skeleton, no matter how luxurious the crypt in which that skeleton lies. When they descend into the crypt of their family estate, Orlando observes that "all pomp is built upon corruption; how the skeleton lies beneath the flesh; how we that dance and sing above must lie below" (53). In this view, the only thing that gives a body meaning is the consciousness that animates it, and that consciousness ceases to exist with death, turning the body into a mere shell onto which the living erroneously project meaning. Similarly, when buildings are deprived of human presence, they become mere embodiments of former projections without inherent meaning. Left unattended by human consciousness, they are like empty mantelpieces that "will likely be covered with dust—until the next homeowner/artist takes possession" (Allen 29). Buildings and the human bodies that construct them are only meaningful insofar as consciousness exists to imbue them with meaning. Human meaning in the past and future is destined for oblivion because the moment an object is no longer lent meaning by a present human consciousness is the moment it begins to be reclaimed by nature.

Woolf explores this form of oblivion-by-nature in the "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse*. This short interlude is characterized by the absence of human subjects as the Ramsay family leaves their home and, in their place, Woolf "depicts both the organic life that has moved into the Ramsay house and the inorganic objects that were left behind as vibrantly material" (Lostoski 66). The only form of humanity that remains is the narrator who "continues to emphasize that the house is 'empty' and 'deserted,'" representing "humanity's [...] inability to perceive the vitality of nonhuman materialities" (66). While the narrator cannot name the vitality of nonhuman materialities, however, this limitation only suggests that "Without the lingering presence of the human, existence would continue but be unimaginable," and therefore "The role of the narrative voice is to suggest presence and continuity even in human absence" (Wisker 18). By removing the Ramsay family from

their home, Woolf "challenge[s] the primacy of human agency" through a "decentering of the human and recognition of the vitality of all matter" (Lostoski 55). Like Orlando's estate, this home is left behind, but unlike Orlando's estate, the building is not merely an abandoned object-turned-thing, but remains an object as it is acted upon by a new, non-human subject: nature.

"Time Passes" is a commentary upon the transience of human constructions and the eternal quality of nature. The section portrays nature as a force that can never be permanently stayed by human intervention because "The realm of what is in existence is continuous, cyclical, eternal" (Wisker 19). Nature can only be temporarily kept at bay by human constructions, but its perpetual advance comes to the forefront when human intervention is removed from the equation, leaving nature to "gently" work away at the materials within the Ramsay home because it knows that "there [is] time at [its] disposal" (104). The anthropomorphized natural elements are aware of their eternal existence and of the fact that, without human presence, "Nothing [...] could break that image, corrupt that innocence, or disturb the swaying mantle of silence" (106). Woolf shows that even books—purveyors of ideology—are not immune to nature's consumption. Though the Ramsays' books were "black as ravens once," nature leaves them "white-stained, breeding pale mushrooms and secreting furtive spiders" (114). This represents a consumption of humanity itself, as Wisker asserts that "By recalling, creating, writing, we preserve what's past," leaving a decidedly human "imprint on the world" (18). The books seem to constitute what remains of a human imprint on the house and they are slowly succumbing to nature.

However, despite nature's consumption, the narrator still finds humanity within the home and temporarily reconciles nature with humanity. The narrator observes that "What people had shed and left—a pair of shoes, a shooting cap, some faded skirts and coats in wardrobes—those alone kept the human shape and in the emptiness indicated how once they were filled and animated" (106). The memory of humanity that the clothes invoke—the lives they represent—gives the narrator a reason to recall human life in a space over which nature reigns. Perhaps, just as the narrator can look at the overgrown Ramsay house and "marvel how the beauty outside mirrored the beauty within" (109), one can also find sanctity in the co-existence of humanity and nature rather than vainly struggling to keep them separated.

Orlando portrays this unity, as the protagonist's partial liberation from the confines of hegemony comes from a unification of their identity and nature. Even as a "man," Orlando demonstrates an underlying preference for nature over nation. When they wandered about their land, the Biographer watched as Orlando "sighed profoundly, and flung himself [...] on the earth at the foot of the oak tree"

because "He loved, beneath all this summer transiency, to feel the earth's spine beneath him" (15). In the face of an ever-changing world, Orlando finds comfort in connecting himself to the permanence of nature. Johnson asserts that "Although their quantifying, proprietary gaze undergoes revision over the course of the 'biography,' Orlando's relationship to the land remains elemental" (116). However, even though "the geography of England is indeed central to Orlando's identity" (117), they fail to respect this facet of their identity as a "man" because they are expected to fixate on materiality and property, not nature. Furthermore, as a writer whose artistic vision is dominated by hegemonic norms to such an extent that "there was never a word said as he himself would have said it" (*Orlando* 13), Orlando finds himself unable to write authentically about the natural landscape they revere. They succumb to the notion that "Green in nature is one thing, green in literature another" because "Nature and letters seem to have a natural antipathy; bring them together and they tear each other to pieces" (14). Due to the expectations imposed on them as a British "man" residing in an estate, Orlando is unable to fully appreciate nature, bringing it into conflict with their art.

Appropriately, it is nature's invasion of Orlando's home as they try to write that initially prompts them to abandon the estate. They grow frustrated because they had just "furnished [their] house with silver and hung the walls with arras," yet "at any moment a dung-bedraggled fowl could settle upon [their] writing table" (87). The "dung-bedraggled fowl" referred to here is, in fact, the Archduchess, while the nature against which Orlando is forced to fight is their own lust for this woman. Nevertheless, Orlando struggles against this particular form of "nature" as it infiltrates their home. Indeed, even when Orlando "chased her out," the bird came back and "pecked at the glass till she broke it" (87). Nature persistently finds ways to break artificial barriers between earthly and domestic spaces, representing a marked intrusion of nature into Orlando's life. While nature had previously occupied Orlando's mind, they were able to suppress those thoughts by turning their attention towards their estate. Having decorated their estate only to have nature find its way in, however, Orlando now needs to look elsewhere for respite from nature's repeated intrusions. Still trapped by the expectations imposed by a patriarchal and colonial order, Orlando's solution is to turn away from their writing table—for nature and writing cannot mix—and embark on larger "duties" to the British Empire by "[asking] King Charles to send him as Ambassador Extraordinary to Constantinople" (87). Little does Orlando know, Constantinople is the precise location where nature seizes a permanent hold on their life.

Orlando initially views Constantinople in much the same way as the narrator of *To the Lighthouse* perceives the abandoned Ramsay home, with Johnson noting that "Turkey is initially signified by absences that fit into the shape of

England's 'realness'" (118). However, as Orlando gains exposure to a radically different culture and terrain, they slowly realize that "nations are bounded by frontiers of spectral space where ideology and the category of the 'real' are open to transformation" (119). Orlando realizes that what they had perceived as "natural" or "real" in England was only a projected ideology since they are now bearing witness to a completely different ideological system within a different landscape and culture. As they immerse themselves among the "gipsies," who "thought that there was no more vulgar ambition than to possess bedrooms by the hundred [...] when the whole earth is ours" (109), Orlando slowly aligns themselves with the earth rather than their possessions. As their subject attaches themselves to a culture "where Nature was so much larger and more powerful than in England," the Biographer observes that Orlando "fell into [Nature's] hands as she had never done before" (106). Ideology—what is seen as "real"—has the ability to transform depending on the national space from which it arises, but human subjects are still needed to internalize those ideologies. Orlando is just such a subject as the "natural" culture and space of Constantinople transforms their perspective on what is "real" both about themselves and the world around them.

While Orlando does gain the liberating insight that the ideologies which prevent them from writing authentically are constructed and transient, they also learn the "difficult lesson that national space is not only racialized and reflective of class status, but gendered as well" (Johnson 118). Orlando's outlook may have changed for the better, but they are still confined to a sexed body that will have ideology projected onto it. To elucidate this point, Woolf pairs Orlando's change of perspective with a transformation of sex from male to female. Although Orlando aligns with their true passions by saturating their worldview with a "love of Nature" (*Orlando* 106), the expectations that are imposed on them based on their external appearance—especially a marginalized "female" appearance—still prove to be an obstacle to authenticity and agency. Indeed, the Biographer remarks that "Many people" believe that "such a change of sex is against nature," leaving some of these people "at great pains to prove [...] that Orlando had always been a woman" or "that Orlando is at this moment a man" (103). Society's fixation remains on Orlando's body with the ultimate goal of figuring out where to place them within the larger patriarchal system, regardless of Orlando's felt identity.

Orlando, in fact, manages to find some liberation in their new sex. Being "forced to consider [their] position" (103), they find that "[they were] too well pleased with the change to spoil it by thinking" because "The pleasure of having no documents to seal, or sign, no flourishes to make, no calls to pay was enough" (104). They enjoy no longer being "locked in" to the duties expected of men, implying that there was a disconnect between those gendered expectations and Orlando's genuine identity. While Orlando

certainly struggles on account of their transformation—at one point declaring “A pox” on “the sacred responsibilities of womanhood” (116)—it also affords them another critical insight: gendered clothes “change our view of the world and the world’s view of us” (138). They gain the reflexivity to perceive how their external appearance mediates their relationship with society, even when their identity remains “fundamentally the same” (173). While they delight in no longer needing to perform the duties expected of them as a “man,” these duties are replaced by a new set of expected roles and behaviours that feel disingenuous. Neither set of roles fit because neither of them conforms to Orlando’s internal reality. Their duality of sexed experience thus affords them a three-dimensional view of the patriarchy and the inhumanity of its enforced gender roles.

Orlando’s awakening to the constructed, oppressive nature of ideology grows even further through their alignment with nature. By fully allowing themselves to become “nature’s bride” (182), they hone their ability to transcend measured human time. The Biographer identifies an “extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind” as “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” (72). As nature achieves victory over ideology in Orlando’s worldview, so too does a subjective experience of time triumph over the measured units clock time. Prior to Orlando’s transformation, the Biographer perceives a connection between moments when Orlando connects with nature and a transcendence of time, writing that “directly he was alone on the mound under the oak tree, the seconds began to round and fill until it seemed as if they would never fall” (72-3). Just as nature persists in reclaiming the Ramsays’ house in a decade that is presented as a mere snapshot, Orlando’s life “seemed to him of prodigious length. Yet even so, it went like a flash” (73). Orlando’s fantastical, centuries-long lifespan can therefore be explained partially in terms of their relationship to nature.

Orlando’s transcendent lifespan also stems from their alignment with their internal nature—their identity—represented by their vocation as a writer. As Drumlin Crape points out, “Woolf uses the persistent, chosen, and personal vocational impulse of writer to demonstrate the presence of a core identity in the title character” (1). Internal and external nature connect intimately in shaping Orlando’s new experience of subjective reality. Though their experience of writing as a “man” assumed a “natural antipathy” between nature and writing, the Biographer notes that Orlando’s “taste for books was an early one” (*Orlando* 55), just as a love of nature was “inborn” in them (106). These two infatuations combine symbolically in Constantinople as Orlando attempts to work on their poem, “The Oak Tree.” Discovering that “[They] had no ink; and but little paper,” they resourcefully “made ink from berries and wine” while “finding a few margins and blank spaces in the manuscript”

(107). Not only does Orlando produce out of nature itself the very ink with which to create literature, but they also allow their “natural” ink to exist in the same space as the industrial ink they used in England. In this single act, Orlando reconciles nature with writing and old self with new self in a way that “kept her extremely happy for hours on end” (108). They have unified, and therefore acknowledged, the two elements that have defined their identity since childhood.

Indeed, like immersion in nature, the Biographer links the production of art to a transcendence of time, claiming that time-keeping is “a difficult business” and that “nothing more quickly disorders it than contact with any of the arts” (224). However, the poem on which Orlando has been working throughout the novel—“The Oak Tree”—is the same piece in which there was “never a word written as he himself would have said it.” Although Orlando has managed to write some of their newfound self onto this manuscript in their naturally-created ink, the text that dominates its pages still reflects an artistic vision that was clouded by ideology. Believing now that writing should be “a secret transaction” (238), they no longer need the false identity embodied in “The Oak Tree.” Consequently, they resolve to bury it “as a tribute [...] a return to the land of what the land has given me” (*Orlando* 238). While the attempted burial sounds like a gesture of respect on the surface, Orlando’s final decision to let the manuscript “lie unburied and dishevelled on the ground” (238) implies an indifference to its fate.

Disillusioned to, and disenfranchised by, the ideology of England, Orlando rejects the nation by discarding “The Oak Tree” and fully accepts their role as a writer without a nation. Johnson makes the point that “Writers need a place from which to write” but that “in the case of the exile or the migrant [...] this ‘place’ does not necessarily correspond to a national space” (123). Orlando has rejected their birth nation as well as their former estate, remarking that “Of wall or substance there was none. All was phantom” (240). They recognize that the ideologies represented by the estate are constructed rather than natural because their time in Constantinople demonstrated the changeability of ideology in different spaces. Additionally, their alignment with nature and art affords them a transcendence over the human lifespan, allowing them to recognize the changeability of ideology *over time*. Ideology will only ever reflect the values of the people who are in control of the “truth” at any given moment, and when those people change, so too does ideology. Orlando’s new perspective on reality is therefore not merely three-dimensional, for its unbounded temporality makes it four-dimensional. They are able to perceive ideology across space and time, and this exposes it as an artificial, temporary human construct.

Woolf’s experimentations with time and space mirror those of her contemporaries whose writing “often develops a treatment of the Other, of boundaries and of

issues of space and time, that [...] relate to [their] positions within domestic and economic relations" (14). Woolf recognized that women were victims of an ideology predicated upon fixed notions of time and space. *Orlando's* four-dimensional perspective is Woolf's means of demonstrating the shifting nature of these dimensions and the fact that ideology necessarily shifts with them. She is therefore, like *Orlando*, choosing to overcome these false constraints through her art by writing the realities of nature rather than the constructs of nation. Indeed, *Orlando's* biographer argues that "Only those who have little need of the truth, and no respect for it—the poets and the novelists—can be trusted" to document history because "this is one of the cases where the truth does not exist [...] The whole thing is a miasma—a mirage" (141). Art has the unique power to illuminate the interconnectedness of humanity and nature while exposing the façade of ideology. Wisker writes that "narrators themselves enable continuity [...] the role of fiction is to preserve and ensure existence" (19), and writers like Woolf knew that ideology would betray nature by erasing women from history if not for art's ability to transcend the boundaries of time and space.

Nevertheless, while art has the power to subvert time and space, female-coded people must continue to live within ideology, and Woolf addresses this reality in *Three Guineas*. She points out that ideology's pervasiveness does not mean that one cannot find a more genuine place *within* a given society after having perceived its imbalances. Woolf expresses her utter disenfranchisement from England due to her sex, declaring "as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (*TG* 234). Just as *Orlando* recognizes the arbitrary nature of borders and the falsehood of the ideologies they contain, Woolf here does away with borders, opting instead to recognize a universal humanity.

Conceding that humanity cannot escape ideology, however, she instead proposes a method for women to use their limited agency productively while not reinforcing the patriarchal system: the "Society of Outsiders" (235). Members of this society would "obtain full knowledge of professional practices" and "reveal any instance of tyranny or abuse in their professions" (238). Because writing was one of the only accessible professions for women, Woolf believed that they should mobilize this practice to voice the inequities that exist in all professions. Additionally, members of this society would "cease all competition and [...] practise their profession experimentally, in the interests of research and for love of the work itself" (238). The Society is just as concerned with allowing women to pursue their passions as it is with identifying oppression. To this end, Woolf asserts that the Society of Outsiders will take it as "one of their aims to increase private beauty; the beauty of spring, summer, autumn; the beauty of flowers" (239). *Orlando* embodies this desire to write about nature, not in the public "British" sense

that they had written in "The Oak Tree," but in a new literature that expresses their *private* experience of nature as it resonates with their genuine identity.

While *Orlando* remains a published author within a capitalist society who is married to a man and must surrender their property to a male heir, they have achieved the perspective necessary to find their own place *within* that oppressive system. Their vision transcends the ideologies that constrain them. Their published works might be relegated to the most remote shelves of the Oxbridge Library, but now *Orlando* has the four-dimensional understanding of the library to know that this does not reflect a natural inadequacy in themselves, but instead reflects the unnatural inhumanity of the patriarchy. Knowing that the library is human-made allows *Orlando* to see that it is not an element of nature, but an artificial construction designed and built at a definite point in history with no prior existence in human life. Awareness of the fact that specific human minds are responsible for the library's construction, as well as the selection of books that line its shelves, enables an understanding of the ideological motivations for doing these things. The library is but a projection of one ideology amongst many and is no more truthful than any of the others despite its prestigious allure. *Orlando* is no longer "locked out," nor have they had to remain "locked in," when it comes to ideology. They choose to live amongst a Society of Outsiders that believes "those also serve who remain outside" (*TG* 245). Ideology still dictates the outward meaning of their body, but nature creates their subjective reality. As the Biographer states, "*Orlando* had so ordered it that she was in an extremely happy position; she need neither fight her age, nor submit to it; she was of it, yet remained herself" (196). The story ends with *Orlando* sitting on the outskirts of the property they used to own, beneath the beloved oak tree that used to relegate their true nature to the margins of the page, but they are not bitter. They are simply present as the clock strikes. They are themselves.

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