

## Time, Self and Style in Virginia Woolf's "Orlando. A Biography"

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Motto:

... a biography beginning in the year 1500 and continuing to the present day, called  
*Orlando*: Vita; only with a change about from one sex to another.

(*A Writer's Diary*, Wednesday, Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>)

I am writing *Orlando* half in a mock style very clear and plain, so that people will understand every word. But the balance between truth and fantasy must be careful.

(*A Writer's Diary*, Saturday, October 22nd, Nineteen Twenty-seven)

### I. The making of the self

What is "real life"? Is it "very solid or very shifting"? Is it "so transitory, flying, diaphanous ... that we ... human beings" prone to "...change must show the light through?" (*AWD*, Friday, January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1929).

What is love? What is death, then? Who is s/he/Orlando? Whose is the voice speaking and the mind creating? Whose face is *read* by searching eyes? - all these question-answer couples take *Orlando's* reader from an outside to an inside world, from a fragmented image of reality to a harmonious whole, from the surface of ordinary existence to the unfathomable depths of the 'I', where present and past co-exist within a timeless "now" and "here".

Virginia Woolf's endeavours of selecting and putting together luminous "moments of being" out of this miscellaneous catalogue called "life" (from the Renaissance to modern times) rise up into the wonderful display of a self's rich and mysterious inner existence, on the one hand, and reveal the artist's desire to shape up the "body" of her texts, on the other hand.

There is no perversity, madness or vicious pleasure in the fierce search of “luminous moments”; on the contrary, there is a purified erotic desire to find the Self through the Word which grows into a multiple-shaped Body = text. The making of the “word’s body” coincides with the process of writing itself which is the “becoming of the Self”, projected along a vertical line, gliding from the Elizabethan age, through the ages of other kings and queens (“James, Charles, George, Victoria”, p.188; up to “the eleventh of October 1928”, p.186), and against a vast geographical territory (England, Russia, Turkey), including diverse mentalities, values and ideals. This strategy of making Orlando experience change, of making him/her feel the taste of metamorphosis and the pulse of (spiritual) transaction unfolds the artist’s obsessive questioning about the nature of the self. The diachronic and synchronic challenges Orlando has to go through are meant to ‘examine’ his/her mind, to let the mind be examined by and be subjected to the Other, to show the way in which such transformations can be linguistically *embodied* and, finally, to trace the trajectory of the self’s becoming into being as text.

The nine novels<sup>1</sup>, from *The Voyage Out* to *Between the Acts*, write the triple “trajectory of becoming” - of the self, of the word, of the text - which, through a continuous movement from surface/outer life to depth/inward being and back to surface, lure the reader into the multiple recesses of a Being’s inner existence and traps her/him into a game whose ultimate purpose is to create poetic signs able to reveal Virginia Woolf’s vision of the world and of “real life”.

From the apparently easy distancing from the shores of the common life/man/language, through rooms, towns, countries, during parties, reunions, plays, empires, up to the intricate and strange “mirroring” of what is *between*, *in* and *out*, the reader is invited to experience the shrewd quest for the Word, the impersonal, abstract Word, and yet, so warm and vibrating with ‘real life’; the word which may contain an artist’s “infinity of thoughts and emotions”, words striving after encapsulating a self’s wholeness.

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1 We consider it impossible to refer to *Orlando. A Biography*, without including it into the Woolfian Text because they all build up a prismatic image of the creative self, having time as a structural backbone. Her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), may be interpreted as an investigation of the needs of a self in quest of a definition of itself other than the one offered by the social world. All the other texts (*Night and Day*, *Jacob’s Room*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando. A Biography*, *The Waves*, *The Years*, *Between the Acts*) continue the artist’s quest for suitable strategies to control time, and yet, not to let life “escape her” (p. 122). Her search through the models (poets, novelists, biographers) offered by the previous ages has one purpose: how to make time cease “hanging heavy on people’s hands” (*Orlando*: 130), how to change its linearity into circularity.

Virginia Woolf's quest is designed in such a way as not to allow the reader to deal with all the threads of her vision of self independently or consecutively; they (social, private, creative, marginal, central, lyrical, ironic, romantic, pragmatic) will weave in and out until they converge into the grand, finely orchestrated Text – a plural nomination/or denomination of its maker/author?

If her diary entries reveal the making up of a *writing self*, her texts suggest the unfolding of the *narrating self* and of the participant's *selves*, all of them incorporating multiple perspectives and orienting the "world" of the text from outward to inward life. This "cyclical return of the genre to its inward matrix" (Cohn 1978: 9) leaves language open-ended so that the *reading self* becomes another distinct sign, always taken care of, and, invited to step into the text, always advised and guided how to read and interpret the "inward world" vibrating with "real life".

Temporality<sup>2</sup> (mediating between history and eternity), the role of memory, the function of the inheritor as *history bearer*, the intricately woven past-present-future pattern, are meant to display the human mind's attempt to break free from the borders of time<sup>3</sup>.

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2 See Parret's *Le sublime du quotidien*, pp. 36-48; or Heidegger's *Being and Time*, with the concepts of "das Man" (pp. 113, 129, 253) vs "authentic Dasein" (pp. 41, 58, 63, 184). Both Parret and Heidegger consider that "temporality" is the condition of restoring the deep trajectory of "a life" which is "the effect" of the discourse, no matter whether this "life" is "one's" life or "my" (Virginia Woolf's) = a chosen person's life. The Virginia Woolf of *A Sketch of the Past* or of her novels grows into the *writing I* inventing, and manipulated by, the strategies of recording the history of a life which manifests itself as a linguistic manifestation of the *written I* through Time. How should a *biography* contain and suggest time, how should a self's/*this time* be read is the narrator's obsession in *Orlando*: "It was now November. After November, comes December. Then January, February, March, and April, After April comes May, June, July August follow. Next is September. Then October, and so, behold, here we are back at November again, with a whole year accomplished. This method of writing biography, though it has its merits, is a little bare, perhaps, and the reader, if we go on with it, may complain that he could recite the calendar for himself and so save his pocket whatever sum the Hogarth Press may think proper to charge for this book" (p. 167).

3 Peter's last dazzling illumination in *Mrs Dalloway* – "It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was." - reveals the moment of synthesis which suspends time into the eternity of a moment of illumination and which creates the syntax of a new perspective: Peter apprehends the truth of that time-capsule which includes both *is and was*, while Clarissa perceives the truth of life and death when reaching that state of union with Septimus Warren Smith.

If in *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*<sup>4</sup>, Woolf dramatizes a being's mind and creates the artistic design of the process of reaching the moments of illumination when an ordinary human being catches a glimpse of the *wholeness* and *luminosity* of the meaning searched for, in *Orlando* she goes further by plunging the *man-womanly-and-woman-manly* being into previous ages of various spaces, each with different ways of perceiving existence. By expanding the cultural present in order to absorb the historical past, does Woolf indirectly hint at the necessity of creating a temporal distance in order to achieve the synthesis of creative revelation? Does she suggest that the meaning of life cannot be fully apprehended while living in the subjective present of a single mind?

What was conceived as a joke, gradually turns into seriousness as it sustains the game of examining one's ordinary mind on an ordinary day, a day which is so large that it may contain the shaping of values and their designing into shape pursued through ages, with its glories and failures, and experienced only by a being capable of changing and assuming different roles. The answer to a question such as "What have I done with my (Mrs. Ramsay's) life?", or, "What was there behind it - her beauty and splendour?" should not circumscribe the subjectivity of an individual's existence. It should be the metaphorical *autobiography* of a quest, of the pursuit of impersonality through the recording of historical, social and cultural events in an artist's life. Orlando's subjective vision transcends the limitations of his/her private experience. The need and aim of the artist is to reach anonymity which should, nevertheless, vibrate with an infinity of meanings within one.

*Orlando. A Biography* is, thus, an exploration/an examination of life by the modern artist's mind which discloses its "parodic, rhapsodic, biographic, fantastic, prosaic" attributes. Unlike Jacob, Orlando is a self-conscious participant in the biographer's quest for selfhood. The rapid change of tone, of styles, the passing of geographical and historical borders, the metamorphosis of sex, enables Virginia Woolf to study:

- a) Orlando's "sameness" as man and woman along centuries and to satirize the "spirit of one age" or praise another age;
- b) Orlando's "diversity" of selves in quest of "her" true self which is the combination of all her identities;
- c) Woolf's "Captain" self that is "able to amalgamate and control" all the other manly and womanly selves.

4 In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf wants to change the "It is Clarissa. For there she was." into "This<sub>it</sub> is Life. For here Mrs Ramsay/my painting is<sub>was</sub>".

This process of "amalgamation" comes out of an intricately woven time pattern whose purpose is to disclose not a change of character but of perception and of social behaviour. The plan is carefully worked out in spite of its light tone; the reader soon discovers a double-functioning duality: when her perceptions are enriched, her social behaviour is restricted while she feels both enlightened and frustrated. Orlando's fatal mistake is committed when taking pride in her sex because the task of a creator<sup>5</sup> is to attain balanced impartiality manifested both in connection to time and the means of expressing life in and through art. Orlando's search for words and images parallels Virginia Woolf's own literary experimentation. The ways of making the "green" in nature be the "green" in literature is a subtle "word-picture" of an artist's struggle to reach aesthetic integrity, to solve the tension between historical exposure and 'cultural'/unvisible 'privacy'.

Orlando does not die – like Bernard in *The Waves*; he/she suddenly changes as if putting on 'new clothes' (Briggs 2000/2001), which shows his/her power to transform inwardly through models offered by cultural time. Orlando establishes an active inter-relationship, a transaction with ages which allows her to write only when having 'conquered' time:

And she heaved a deep sigh of relief, as indeed, well she might, for the transaction between a writer and the spirit of the age is one of infinite delicacy, and upon a nice arrangement between the two the whole fortune of his works depends. 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. Now, therefore, she could write, and write she did.

She wrote. She wrote. She wrote (p. 187)

The relation Orlando establishes with cultural time is supported by a quest and a transfer of values *digested* from models offered by tradition through a reading-writing *transaction*.

## II. The game of reading-writing-reading

Virginia Woolf is an illustrative example of a passionate reader, of the critic-artist for whom the act of reading is art (Goldman 1976). In 'How Should One Read a

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5 In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf considers that "it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or a woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (p. 105).

Book?' (*The Common Reader*, second series, 1932), her advice for the readers of fiction is that they should be both open-minded in order to get rid of all preconceptions about any author and the work which is read and that they should also develop those abilities which might make them see differences:

Steep yourself in this, acquaint yourself with this, and soon you will find that your author is giving you, or attempting to give you, something far more definite. The thirty-two chapters of a novel - if we consider how to read a novel first - are an attempt to make something as formed and controlled as a building; but words are more impalpable than bricks; reading is a longer and more complex process than seeing (p. 25).

As artist/creator, Woolf exploits models<sup>6</sup> offered by different genres – poetry, fiction, drama, from Britain and overseas – or she *examines* either her own life or other ordinary lives on ordinary days, which she re-interprets as *the stuff of fiction*. All her endeavours to “dig up” the literary heritage or the private store of memories have one purpose: that of searching for the unique mood – *the state of mind and heart*, as she calls it – capable of producing the mysterious quality which makes texts turn inward.

Therefore, everything must be inside the book, nothing outside. It is the act of reading and perceiving the others' acts that teaches her how to get rid of the “tight jacket” of the omniscient narrator in order to diagnose the faintest emotions of the self and to bring together the past and present of an experience. Thus, exploiting the qualities of the three genres – a strategy which perfectly corresponds to the artist's state of mind – Virginia Woolf changes both character and its creator into a seeker and reader of truths.

So, the dramatic and poetic quality of a text goes deeper into the very process of reading itself which should trace “the emotion inward” and the “words it is expressed by”. *Orlando* may be interpreted as a cunning *biography* of a reader-writer interested in *catching* and expressing the intensity of a self's inward emotions into “globes of light”/ luminous, vibrant words. It may also be *read* as a recording of Orlando's/Woolf's *states of mind* when apprehending life as a vast and “unfathomable whole” woven in a metaphorical design whose reading is itself a work of art.

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6 For the function of models, mood, mode, modality in Virginia Woolf's texts see Cmeciu 1999: 123-192. Her direct instructions addressed to her reader constitute the metatextual framework of the strange process of how should one interpret a model in order to make a text and to have it read and understood.



This game of reading-writing provides Orlando, the author of "*The Oak Tree*, a poem", an organizing principle and illustrates what her narrative roles have shown: that she remains an artist-critic/critic-artist whose texts exude that cultural-poetic quality bound up with an intense desire to respond not to the requirements of her own age but to the needs of her creative self: a life-long pursuit of pure and true emotion.

... and out upon the table fell 'The Oak Tree', a poem.

'A manuscript!' said Sir Nicholas, putting on his gold pince-nez. 'How interesting, how excessively interesting! Permit me to look at it.' And once more, after an interval of some three hundred years, Nicholas Greene took Orlando's poem and, laying it down among the coffee cups and the liqueur glasses, began to read it. But now his verdict was very different from what it had been then. It reminded him, he said as he turned over the pages, of Addison's *Cato*. It compared favourably with Thomson's *Seasons*. There was no trace in it, he was thankful to say, of the modern spirit. It was composed with a regard to truth, to nature, to the dictates of the human heart, which was rare indeed, in these days of unscrupulous eccentricity. It must, of course, be published instantly (p. 175)

The reading-writing game foregrounds another interesting aspect: by bringing the cultural heritage to the surface of time – to the present – the narrator of the biography creates a discourse of preservation by means of which remote (ordinary) moments are rescued from death and invested with a sense of eternity when made "to live in another time and space": that of the Woolfian text. Recording the richness of the self's experiences (through details), the narrator metaphorically rescues time and remakes a whole tradition (Shakespeare, Addison, Pope, the Victorians) by simultaneously destroying and rebuilding it (from different perspectives). The 'biography' turns inward again with the quest of the words able to make the text convey the meanings intended by the biographer. The process of searching and shaping these words and of weaving them into a textual fabric generates its own 'reality'. Orlando can be encountered only in the pages/space of the text and during the time of reading it. The reader's entering the realm of the text is a process of "resurrection" as far as s/he is forced to recognize that Orlando's existence depends on his/her own way of decoding the words s/he is reading. This makes the circle of narration, of producing the words and of apprehending their meanings find its completeness: the past joining the present when the participants (Orlando, biographer and reader) already prove to be dwellers of "another world/existence". A new synthesis is formed when both writing and re-reading (of cultural time) merge, for a moment, into the same creative process which brings the whole text to order.

Writing, repeated within the act of reading, becomes the only process of creation which is/"exists" and "sums up all", simultaneously, in one moment, when death and life co-exist through art. This reading-writing-reading process is intricately woven into a very special stylistic design of perceiving time: the game of "plunging into the pool of time" in order to search for the truths of the present moment.

### III. The game of positing

The changes undergone by Orlando in his quest of life, of reality, of the meaning of love and death, of friendship and truth, are all interwoven with his/her experiencing of time:

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 (p. 61).

What is time? Is the time of thinking longer than the time of doing? (p. 61) Is this ... what people call life? (p. 122) Orlando? – called with a note of interrogation in her voice and waited (for one self to come) (p.193) what then? who then? ... Greedy, luxurious, vicious? Am I? (here a new self came in) (p. 194).

What Virginia Woolf is in pursuit of in *Orlando* is the young man's/or woman's state of mind. She examines the character's imaginative powers which enable him/her to experience changes that mark his/her desire to be free, to get rid of social constraints, to live and feel time differently: "... time when he is thinking becomes inordinately long; time when he is doing becomes inordinately short" (p. 61). Experiencing a time of becoming, Orlando discovers that it may be reversible. Horizontality turns into a fall-rise trajectory which is accompanied by a double metamorphosis: of the character, who is different with each new quest, and of the word, which gradually turns from a flat/ denotative entity into a plurisignificant sign. The changes undergone by being and word/ (linguistic tool of communicating emotion and thought) are structured on a tripartite pattern.

"This extraordinary discrepancy between time on the clock and time in the mind is less known than it should be and deserves fuller investigation" (p. 61), Orlando says. Through *anticipation* and *interrogation*, the "mind" of the past = culture brings the future to the present and creates a condensed time. It grows into "rings"



only for those selves who want "to fly out of simplicity", forming a succession of acts creating order.

It is the time of Orlando's search for identity. If the linguistic temporality of the "real" time is the Present Tense of verbs in a succession of "nows", the time of interrogation is the vectorial future when the human mind is at work and creates tension, the tension of the past within the future, of the infinite seen not as a line, but of the infinite seen as a circle.

At the border of "the time of interrogation" and "the time of becoming into being" there stand the changing selves –

... these selves of which we are built up, one on top of the another, as plates are piled on a waiter's hand ... for everybody can multiply from his own experience the different terms which his different selves have made with them ... (p. 193).

This new type of temporality puts forth the power of the self to multiply itself and to disclose at least two sides: one living into the "real" time and disappearing, the other one living in the "time of becoming" and growing into a synthesis which is in search of new connexions able to express the energy of the mind.

The structural pattern which supports Orlando's changes and the becoming of the poetic word is achieved through a positing of time, self and word en abyme<sup>7</sup>, en hauteur and en surface.

The mise en abyme develops gradually, as a three-staged process:<sup>8</sup>

- a) firstly, it works as an addition, a crust upon crust of ordinary properties rendered by means of repetition; the function of this stage is to get rid of "servitude" and to create another type of text: "I'll write from this day forward to please myself" (p.64);
- b) secondly, it gives up its transitivity, as it ceases speaking, on the contrary it is spoken about; the function of this stage is to change the materials/stuff to be used into intertext; thus, the messages collected during the first stage are broken and

7 A Gide tried to find an adequate label for this recurrent phenomenon and technique, typical of the Baroque, turning to heraldry. In a letter to Paul Valéry (15 November 1891) he wrote "one can compare it to a coat of arms where one image places a second one in an en abyme position." (apud Dällenbach, L., p. 17). The other two stylistic strategies, positing en hauteur and en surface, have been coined by the author of the article.

8 Dällenbach, L. (1977): *Le Recit Speculaire. Essai sur le mise en abyme*, Seuil. The French critic considers that "the mise en abyme is a modality of reflexivity whose essential property is that of revealing the formal structure of a text" (p. 16).

- are rhythmically re-arranged into “new wholes”; the text creates the dialogue with itself which is completed with the third stage;
- c) thirdly, the signifieds turn into signifiers endowed with a great power of connoting through the richness and density acquired during the first two stages which, through repetition and rhythm, have already established a pattern of becoming; the function of this third stage is that of giving birth to a new reality/text/word within a sudden revelation and of making the reader apprehend that moment of illumination as a poetic vision<sup>9</sup>.

Moving through the three stages, from transitivity to intransitivity, from denotation to connotation, from external reality to the word, we can say that what *Orlando* finally offers is language placed – structurally, thematically and dramatically – en abyme. The dialogue which language establishes with itself includes an interesting mode of self-mirroring, which traces the trajectory of the word’s changing the outward reality/ getting rid of denotative sediments with an inward life/acquiring the significations desired by the artist: from the oak tree in nature to ‘The Oak Tree’, a poem, there is a woven fabric of signifiers and signifieds meant to reveal the artist’s trials to force the richness of outer life (however fragmented it may be) into powerful linguistic containers. In order to make any reader perceive this metamorphosis of the word and to reveal the peeling off denotative shells until reaching the *wordness*-within-word, the artist posits Orlando into a temporal abyme; all the consequences of such a positing are the effect of Orlando’s experiencing the time of different ages. Moments of temporal crises, of doubts, fears and loves are woven within the text; ages are made to reflect each other, to examine each other, an exercise which gives shape to a text-within-text structure. The putting into discourse of such temporal experiences create a metaphorical *autobiography* of the word.

This game of cramming up memories and hopes, going some four-three-two hundred years back in time, or of the recording of old cultural practices shows the artist’s desire to investigate, explore and exploit old modes of reading-writing a mind’s complex workings. Thus, the text becomes a text *en* and *of* *abyme* at the same time. It *posits* – in prose, or in poetry, in elegy, in parody, or in irony – modes

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9 If James Joyce recorded the moments of revelation with extreme care as he believed that beauty and truth are revealed by *epiphany* (“a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself”; see *Stephen Hero*, or *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), Virginia Woolf considered that “life” can be *read-written* through the word’s power of suggestiveness within a *process of illumination* during which a self’s experiences cohere in a “whole”, which is emotionally vibrant.

of feeling and thinking characteristic of an existence at the Elizabethan court, or some time around 1928, "on a wintry Monday" or "on a sunny Tuesday".

The words cease being flat denotative shells, lying dead on the bottom of the text: by interior reduplication, which allows the whole text "to give birth" to "an inner mirror" able to reflect it in its structure, its principles and in the process of its own genesis, the words acquire a reflexive capacity which contaminates the whole text and which requires being repositied *en surface* as metaphorical "round globes" = the "luminous" carriers of meanings discovered in the "abyeme" of the text.

Through expansion and contraction, what is far back in the past and far forward in the future are brought together and made to reflect each other within this game of positionings. And yet, the game is incomplete if it is not observed, interpreted and judged from a temporal distance. The 'face' *examined* and 'the eyes' *examining* the face of an individual (belonging to an age) perform an act of *reading* where object and subject turn into icons of an age. Whether these icons are true to a specific cultural reality remains for other pairs of eyes, through ever other acts of reading, to perceive. The multiplication of such acts weaves, in the end, a series of reflections reaching the outward reality of perceivers belonging to ages which are farther forward in time. This "mirror"/= eyes outside, searching for new meanings within an act of resignification, constitutes the third type of "positioning" = the *mise en hauteur* of the text as it places the triad production – producer – audience/reader on another direction; there is a shift of interest from the text's capacity of producing itself to the receiver's capacity of perceiving her/himself in a new light and of reflecting upon her/his past and future while simultaneously reflecting upon the text.

This game of positionings enhances the dramatic quality of the discourse as it leads the reader into admitting that all efforts are made for the poising of a single "moment of being" = a significant moment of vision in the temporal circularity and the singling out of an intensely vibrant emotion. Reaching the temporal roots of creation/the birth of the "vibrant word" (the word-within-the word), this technique changes into a process which draws with it, up to the "centre", all the other dimensions of the text or text-producing activities. Thus, the *mise en abyme*, *en hauteur* and *en surface* do not work as a formal ordering device, automatically arranging the text on a triple level; it rather creates a trinitary pattern within which the game of reflexivity establishes a circular movement leading to strongly connotative "centres" working as metaphorical plots".

## IV. The process of metaphorization

Backgrounded against the psychic time of adventure, the self experiences deep changes through moving from a centrality as referent to Orlando as metaphor of the creative self. Through repeated transformations, the text itself is *Orlando* who writes its own story as subject. The passing through six successive historical times while knowing the adventures and trials of how a (wo)man's feelings are put into discourse coincides with the shaping of the text's body = identity and its inscribing unto time through a dramatic clash for supremacy between selves.

The process of the self's becoming, its continuous changing in order to attain complexity and the need to verbalize all the metamorphoses is metaphorically supported by the weaving of a textual fabric where polarities attract each other. *Orlando* is not the history of one self but the recording of the eternal search of the self's other. It is not the opposition man – woman, life – death, nature – art, outward – inward, stagnation – movement<sup>10</sup> that Woolf is interested in, but she shows great interest in the process of transferring significations from one member of the polarity to the other. Thus, opposition is only apparent; being structured on the discourse of change, the text unreels itself as a process of unfolding the self through its relationship with the other by preserving the time axis as the pledge for the “truth of the matter” (p. 19).

Orlando's transformation, which foregrounds the self from a structural, thematic and linguistic perspective, is linked with the power of imagination to conceive reality in metaphorical terms. The same discourse, which contains the stages of metamorphosis, shows that there exists a sense of time in metaphor, which highlights its characteristics as process rather than a cut-in-stone product. Then, *Orlando*, incorporating within its own *body* a metaphorical dimension built up on the desire to experience a slow gliding or a sudden change from one state of mind to another, writes itself as an (*auto*)biography (one of as many (*auto*)biographies as readers will be) of the creative self's spiritual becoming. If the early cultural and spiritual biography of Orlando's self reveals a narrator/observer in the mood of *translating* the reality outside into metonymic patterns inside the text, later in her life, Orlando perceives the world in metaphorical terms. And yet, the two modes of writing create an intricate pattern of poetic discourse, as a glorification of the self and as a triumph of the text/word containing and revealing that self.

10 See the metaphors of the frost and of the river.

IV.1. Modes<sup>11</sup> of writing: metonymy and metaphor

The discourse of change raises the problem of Orlando's power of transgressing borders of time and of sex, that is, the boundaries between self and its other. The positing en hauteur foregrounds one important aspect which the reader should take into consideration: are there two different Orlandos/two or more different selves, a split self, or a single Key Self (containing "two thousand and fifty-two" other different selves "lodging at one time or another in the human spirit", p. 192)?; are there sufficient traits preserved from Orlando the man into Orlando the woman, or from Orlando read as a page to Orlando read as the creator of the poem? The answer to such questions is given by the narrator's perspective on the semiotic function of the word<sup>12</sup> (the problem of reference) and on the way in which the two structural principles of language (according to Roman Jakobson) – selection and combination – work at the level of discourse. By making Orlando work as a sign, Virginia Woolf is

11 We consider *mode* as both a way of existence and a method of expressing that specific way of being, whose main function is that of showing the qualities of a text – the way in which a text signifies.

Out of the long tradition in the *history* of mode (Plato and Aristotle; Benveniste, 1966; Jacques Lacan, 1968; Tzvetan Todorov, 1971; G. Genette, 1982; J. Kristeva, 1970; Juri Lotman, 1976; Seymour Chatman, 1978; Umberto Eco, 1979, 1990), we will take only three names: R. Jakobson (1956) who considers that the metonymic and the metaphoric modes are manifestations of the combinative and the selective processes characteristic of literature; David Lodge (1977), who, developing Jakobson's theory, shows that metonymy and metaphor are two modes of writing literature (we may add irony as a third mode of writing, exploited particularly in the latter half of the 20th century), giving a text its stylistic unity; and Harvena Richter (1978), who suggests that the only method of analysing Woolf's texts should be the study of her subjective modes as far as the "central fact of her fiction is the moment" and "... the concept of emotional life as reality... of feeling compounded of the synthesized responses of mind and body, acting as a unit, to outside influences ... is of foremost importance in understanding the principle underlying Virginia Woolf's fiction: that a novel is *not form which you see but emotion which you feel.*" (p. 30). Richter's modes of subjectivity are 'emotional' approaches to Woolf's texts, which we consider to be only one side of the coin.

12 It is worth mentioning that the conventionality of signs (just a series of useful words used by everybody) as opposed to the power of suggestiveness of the words used by a writer (that is, of the words made to contain life) is felt by Orlando the woman: "Life? Literature? One to be made into the other? But how monstrously difficult! For – here came by a pair of tight scarlet trousers – how would Addison have put that? Here came two dogs dancing on their hind legs. How would Lamb have described that? For reading Sir Nicholas and his friends ..., she somehow got the impression ... they made one feel – it was an extremely uncomfortable feeling – one must never, never say what one thought" (pp. 178-179).

not so much interested in expanding the borders of the signifier in order to 'make more room' for whatever (absurd) significations invented by the decoder's subjectivity<sup>13</sup>. She is much more concerned with examining the word's power to 'mirror' itself in something else. Such an act of reflecting itself is achieved through an intricate process of metaphorization working at the level of the whole text. Required by the discourse of change, it is structured on the cause-effect relation (characteristic of metonymy), which foregrounds the *before-after* temporal pattern, and continues with the selection of *moments of being* caught into suggestive words, an exercise which, although pushing to the background the temporal axis, is still forced to preserve it as everything (character, writing, reading) is felt as process.

The contiguity or coexistence of states of mind is reinforced by the transformation of the information stored in the (pool of the) mind and offered to a further search of similarities and differences until reaching a state of being through illumination, conceptually rendered through metaphor. This is not a mere alternation or intermingling of metonymy and metaphor (as modes of thinking and writing). Virginia Woolf makes them work simultaneously in order to suggest difference within that special Captain Self Orlando is in search of. It is only by such a process that the dramatic clash within the relationship of representation – object represented is suggestively expressed. The game of positing en abyme, en surface and en hauteur self, time, discourse and text makes the reader visualize Orlando's obsessive search of 'real' self and 'real' life as a metaphorical production of an emotionally vibrant word through a circular movement from *plunge* to *rise* until reaching an ecstatic state of being. Thus, the creative self's discourse of change is metaphorically rewritten through the text's reflexivity: the he-Orlando's adventures being re-membered by the she-Orlando's memories as threads within the fabric of writing<sup>14</sup>.

13 See, for example, Orlando's invocation of her name (the signifier containing many different people belonging to various ages, pp.192-194), her decoding of names ("... a name which had in her mind the steel-blue gleam of rooks' wings, the hoarse laughter of their caws, the snake-like twisting descent of their feathers in a silver pool, and a thousand other things ... p. 156) or her name decoded by the other ('Mine is Orlando,' she said. He [Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine] had guessed it. For if you see a ship in full sailcoming with the sun on it proudly sweeping across the Mediterranean from the South Seas, one says at once, 'Orlando', he explained" p. 156).

14 The change of the denotative meaning of the oak tree into several connotative significations is the most illustrative example of the sense of time which the metaphor contains. The visualisation of the *growth* of the text raises the problem of such dualities as: joy and pain, surface and depth, eternity and transiency: if sap seems to run smoothly behind the bark, if branches seem to put forth le-



This means that metaphor and metonymy are not a "supplementation of discourse with rhetorical adornment but a total re-evaluation of the discourse and of all its components whatsoever"<sup>15</sup>. The language in use becomes the main object of Virginia Woolf's concept of *mode*. How can words cease lying flat and being dry shells unable to vibrate with emotion and idea? How can words grow into "transparent globes" containing both past and present, both the outer and the inner world? What are the modalities used in order to express this specific way of a mind's being, acting or doing in a simultaneous vision? *Orlando* shows the use of language in performance: the way in which metonymy and metaphor *work together* in order to "convey the meaning of reality".

By minimalizing or expanding the significations of the word, Virginia Woolf makes language register the sense impressions in an attempt to trace the wider circumference of a moment; after displaying lots of details, she deliberately guides the reader towards the signification she intends to reveal by focalizing on one (condensed) word, working as a metaphorical "knot"/a unique state of mind; and, finally, she expands that particular paradigm so as to make it incorporate, through associations, myriads of other cultural acts, in an attempt to reach the depth and roundness of an all-inclusive creative "now". Orlando discovers that words are not interchangeable, that a signifier may unfold several signifieds, that a word may be related, through an invisible thread of associations, to another word, which leads to thousands of other thoughts, emotions and things.

The temporal and spatial axes which Orlando is forced to incorporate within his existence and the changes he/she experiences with the crossing of borders, implicitly support the interplay of metonymy and metaphor as an attempt to re-arrange the textual space through images which record a qualitative growth of perception.

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aves naturally, who knows how much pain and suffering, tears and disillusion are contained within the walls of this sign. Orlando's intention to bury her 'The Oak Tree' at the roots of the oak tree "rising on its hill" and her final gesture "to let her book lie unburied and dishevelled on the ground" (p. 203) posit the relation creator – object created – decoder/interpreter into an open circularity, a kind of intertextuality which invites to rewritings and reinterpretations. The 'Orlando-joke' finally proves to be a game-within-a-game by forcing the creative self rise out of a circular process of metaphorization, which, "making manifest" (Heidegger 1995) how something becomes visible in its relation to something else, enhances the importance of relatedness in the act of creation.

15 Jakobson, R.: 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics' in *Style in Language* (ed. by Sebeok, Th.A.), p. 358, apud Hawkes, T.: *Structuralism and Semiotics* (1977), p. 79.

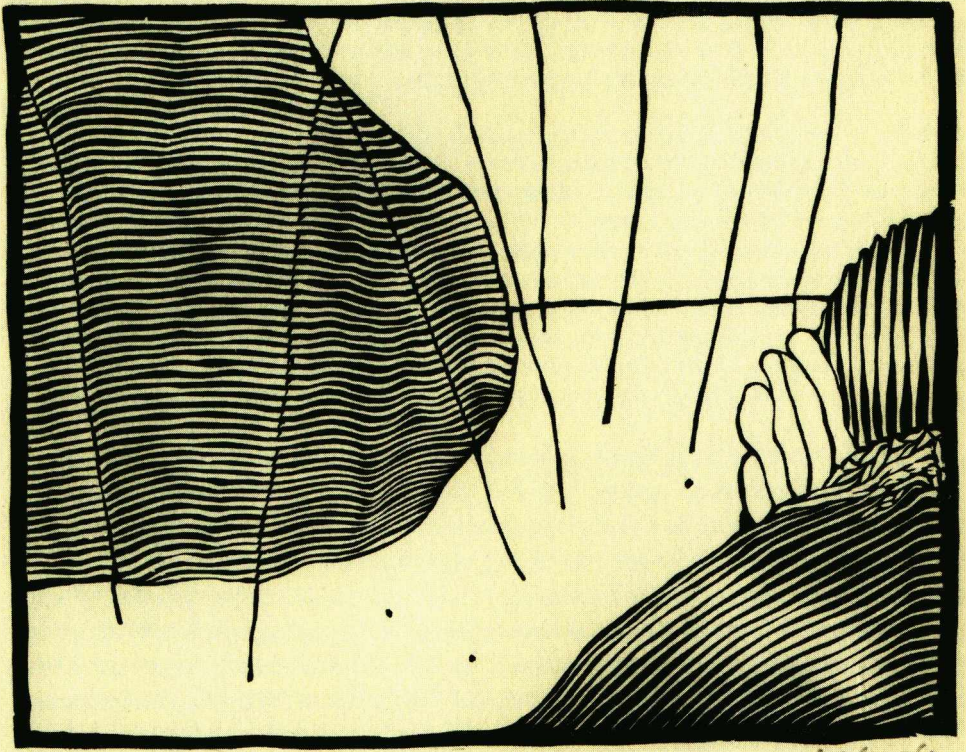
If the discourse of the creative self unfolds itself against this type of framework which is both with-in and with-out time, it certainly partakes of a poetic quality which is perceived, felt and experienced through the making of a plurisignificant Word.

The six<sup>16</sup> attributes of this word which emerge from the working together of games and modes of reading and writing refer to:

1. the "ensemble" of semes forming an "expanding" space (impressions, experiences, sensory images and details, all are meant to form a picture of life);
2. the gradual getting rid of the dry shells of the word until reaching the radiant nucleus (the leaving aside of denotations);
3. the speed of time's passing makes the word grow larger until tapering to a point (time's changing into circularity);
4. the word's growth incorporates contradictions - temporal ones - and forces the reader to cross the borders of historical time and pass into cultural and mythic realms through corresponding temporal variants; what is not possible for the real world which looks disrupted, distorted, dysfunctional, meaningless, takes a coherent shape into a pattern in which the metaphorical *knot* works as plot (the awareness that oppositions coexist in the human system);
5. what was once a linear series of events turns into one round word, a self-generating space with more concentrated trajectories branching off from the associations of subjective times (emotional, cultural, mythological);
6. this is "the moment of being"<sup>17</sup> - the "globe"-word - containing the densest concentration which, through expansion, bursts out into myriads of other glittering little "rings" starting the journey again. The psychological foundation of this lumi-

16 The numbers three, six, seven and thirty-three acquire religious connotations in the Woolfian text: *Orlando. A Biography* is divided into six chapters; there are six characters (three men and three women) in pursuit of a seventh (Percival) in *The Waves*; *To the Lighthouse* is made up of three parts; *Between the Acts* is built up on thirty-three panels, Isa is at the pageant for the seventh time.

17 Virginia Woolf deals with such "moments" in *A Sketch of the Past*:  
"These separate moments of being were however embedded in many more moments of non-being. ... This is always so. A great part of every day is not lived consciously. One walks, eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done; the broken vacuum cleaner; ordering dinner; ... washing; ... bookbinding. When it is a bad day the proportion of non-being is much larger. ... As a child then, my days, just as they do now, contained a large proportion of this cotton wool, this non-being. Week after week passed at St. Ives and nothing made any dint upon me. Then, for no reason that I know about, there was a sudden violent shock; something happened so violently that I have remembered it all my life (p.79)".



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eliza's picture

bez tytułu, drzeworyt 15 x 15,9 cm, *Zbigniew Bielawka*

nous architectural edifice is *desire* - the desire to observe, to discover the truth and knowledge of life, to *read* that life with fresh eyes and to *write* it.

One example of Orlando's vision of an Elizabethan landscape imbued with passion may illustrate Woolf's making the word work as a dynamic sign:

He sighed profoundly, and flung himself - there was a passion in his movements which deserves the word - on the earth at the foot of the oak tree. He loved, beneath all this summer's transiency, to feel the earth's spine beneath him: for such he took the hard root of the oak tree to be: or, for image followed image, it was the back of a great horse that he was riding, or the deck of a tumbling ship - it was anything indeed, so long as it was hard, for he felt the need of something which he could attach his floating heart to; ... To the oak tree he tied it and as he lay there, gradually the flutter in and about him stilled itself ...

After an hour or so - the sun was rapidly sinking, the white clouds had turned red, the hills were violet, the woods purple, the valleys black - a trumpet sounded. Orlando leapt to his feet. The shrill sound came from the valley. It came from a dark spot down there; a spot compact and mapped out; a maze; a town yet girt about with walls; it came from the heart of his own great house in the valley, which, dark before, even as he looked and the single trumpet duplicated and reduplicated itself with other shriller sounds, lost its darkness and became pierced with lights. Some were small hurrying lights as if servants dashed along corridors ...; others were high and lustrous lights, as if they burnt in empty banqueting-halls ...; and others dipped and waved and sank and rose, as if held in the hands of troops of serving men, bending, kneeling, rising, receiving, guarding, and escorting with all dignity indoors a great Princess alighting from her chariot. (Pp. 12-13).

Passion and colour, sound and the unheard movement of the earth, virility and imagination, movement and stillness, hill and valley, openness and enclosure, darkness pierced with light, all such elements contain a strange mixture of male (it is Orlando the man who lives such strong emotions and who surveys the landscape) and female discourse (which anticipates Orlando's later change). The three types of lights (the drawing by means of luminous/womanly hues of horizontal, high and deep trajectories marked by the 'as if' conjunction which opens the gates to an unreal space), the great number of '-ing' participles to describe the actions performed by the men awaiting for Queen Elizabeth and the image of the oak tree as a solid and fixed object for the male (with its roots standing for something else, which hints at Orlando's power as creator of the poem to see through signifiers) subvert the Renaissance discourse. It is not a glorification of man's power, but a celebration of man-womanly-woman-manly perceiving of things around him<sup>her</sup>/self.

What is *Orlando*? Perhaps *a(n) AutoBiography* of 'how not to write like somebody else' (p. 179) when feeling is genuine and when "for some unaccountable reason, the conscious self, which is the uppermost, and has the power to desire,

wishes to be nothing but one self ... the true self ... compact of all the selves we have it in us to be: commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all. Orlando was certainly seeking this self ...” (pp. 193-194)

“Was not writing poetry a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice?” (p. 203).

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*Time, Self and Style in Virginia Woolf's "Orlando. A Biography"*

The paper is an attempt to show Virginia Woolf's 'struggle' to make *ordinary* (life, being and language) become *extraordinary*. *Orlando. A Biography*, a text begun sometime in early October (8th) 1927 "as a joke" and finished on the 17th of March, "as the clock struck one" (AWD:160-161), 1928, may be considered as the prematurely born child of a *mind* endowed with 'one rare gift': that of seeking. It is the seeking of the *Word* which constitutes the backbone of this 'joke'. And yet, behind laughter and light-heartedness, there is a serious desire to discover "the most necessary thing to me [Woolf]" (AWD:169): the 'reality' of the creative self through time.

Thus, the Orlando-biography invites the reader to decode it as an *autobiography*, which, finally, proves to be a recording of a spiritual journey to attain freedom, stylistically achieved through a game of positings and modes of reading and writing. In order to show the process of shaping the creative self in *Orlando*, we have used some strategies offered by approaches such as:

a. phenomenological (offering insights into moods, states of consciousness and the methods used "to investigate" "second selves" (AWD, 1925) – "... opened and intensified as it (the mind) is by the heat of creation" and "to expose" one's mind, body and self "to the blasts of the outer world" (*op.cit.*, 1935);

b. pragmatic (helping the reader to see how "... the words" can be made "to glue together, fuse and glow" (AWD, 1924) and how "sentences form and curve under my fingers" (*op.cit.*, 1935) in order to "convey the true reality" (*op.cit.*, 1923) to somebody;

c. and semiotic (unfolding Woolf's game of minimalising or expanding some meanings, in and through time, which makes out of the word in Woolf's text a dynamic sign).

The three approaches will help the reader to see the Woolfian text as a sign-within-a-sign-within-a-sign. The 'Orlando-joke' finally proves to be a complex game of positing the (creative) self in a temporal abyme, hauteur and surface (Cmeciu 1999), which is unfolded through a metaphoric and metonymic mode (Lodge 1989).

Keywords: (*discourse of*) *change, transaction, time, temporality, self, style, autobiography, process of metaphorization, metonymy, mise en abyme/en hauteur/en surface, text as self, "Orlando"*.