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**Virginia Woolf and Victoria Sackville-West: Orlando as a  
Reflection of their Relationship**

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Studentka se ve své práci zaměří na britskou modernistickou autorku Virginii Woolf a její přítelkyni Victorii Sackville-West s cílem vymezit míru, s jakou jejich vztah ovlivnil vznik románu Orlando, a způsob, s jakým se promítl do dějové a stylistické podoby díla. Práce bude obsahovat detailní rozbor jejich osobní korespondence, který bude tvořit výchozí bod a základnu pro analýzu románu samotného. Práci zakončí závěr prezentující výsledky celého výzkumu a zjištění.

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## **Abstract**

Virginia Woolf belongs to one of the most significant and original writers of the twentieth century. She was known for her feministic attitudes and denial of traditional gender roles as the social construct. She often criticized the unequal position of women in the patriarchal society and its homophobic tendencies. She used experimental approaches towards literature and writing such as so-called “stream of consciousness” in a form of inner monologue, thus she became the leading figure of the modernistic movement in Britain.

The theoretical part of this paper deals with the person of Virginia Woolf as a writer and an intellectual. Her opinions about feminism, gender and androgyny are compared with the general atmosphere of the early twentieth century society.

Further, the paper describes the relationship between Virginia Woolf and Victoria Sackville-West which was the impulse for writing the novel *Orlando* (1928). This novel was inspired by Sackville-West and the story of her life and partially reflected their relationship.

The last chapter deals with the novel *Orlando* itself and how it reflects not only the affinity between Woolf and Sackville-West, but also Virginia Woolf’s own thoughts and viewpoints concerning the ambiguity and complexity of gender and other topics such as artistic creativity, inspiration, importance of fame and meaning of human life in general.

## Souhrn

Virginia Woolf patří k nejvýznamnějším a nejoriginálnějším spisovatelům dvacátého století. Byla známá svými feministickými postoji a odmítáním tradičních společenských rolí jako sociálního konstruktů. Často kritizovala nerovné postavení žen v patriarchální společnosti a její homofobní tendence. Používala experimentální přístupy k literatuře a psaní jako je „proud vědomí“ ve formě vnitřního monologu, tudíž se stala jednou z vedoucích figur Britského modernistického hnutí.

Teoretická část této práce se zaměřuje na postavu Virginie Woolf jako spisovatelky a intelektuálky. Její názory na feminismus, pohlaví a androgynii jsou srovnávány s obecnou atmosférou ve společnosti na počátku dvacátého století.

Dále práce popisuje vztah Virginie Woolf s Victorií Sackville-West, který byl podnětem k napsání románu *Orlando* (1928). Tento román byl inspirován Sackville-West a jejím životem a částečně odráží jejich vztah.

Poslední kapitola se zabývá románem *Orlando* samotným a jak odráží nejen náklonnost Woolf a Sackville-West, ale také myšlenky a stanoviska samotné Virginie Woolf týkající se nejednoznačnosti a složitosti pohlaví a dalších témat jako je například umělecká kreativita, inspirace, důležitost slávy a význam života člověka vůbec.

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## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to focus in detail on one epoch in the life of Virginia Woolf, which was important for her work as well as her inner feelings for a long time. On the following pages, there is described the special close relationship of two women, Virginia Woolf and Victoria Sackville-West (commonly known as Vita). This relationship played a significant role especially for Virginia Woolf, who was inspired by the behaviour, appearance and life of her friend to write the novel *Orlando*. This work pursues the parallels between the main character Orlando and its model Vita Sackville-West.

The reason for the topic of the paper is mainly personal, because the author of the paper is an admirer of Virginia Woolf's astonishing work and is convinced that this writer is one of the most crucial writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The novel *Orlando* does not only reveal the whole extend of Virginia's talent, but also deals with a range of questions about femininity, gender and the position of women in the society.

In the theoretical part, the paper deals in the first place with the person of Virginia Woolf. The main focus is on her attitudes to feminism and the idea of androgyny. These approaches are compared to the social atmosphere the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and common public opinion. Secondly, it covers the interval in lives of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, when they were very close friends. The information was sourced from the private correspondence and other relevant and reliable sources.

The practical part concentrates on the novel *Orlando* and the references, which can be found within and has the connection with Vita Sackville-West and her real existence. The paper also deals with the other significant topics, which can be found in the novel, such as feminism and criticism of the patriarchal society, the theory of androgyny as the ideal human mind and the inspiration for the great works of art and the creative process in general.

The purpose of this paper is not to discredit, scandalize or mock the strong relationship between two women, whose affection was creatively expressed in writing. This topic is covered sensitively, with all due respect, which the author has for Virginia Woolf, her work and intellect, as well as for the homosexual minority.

## 1. Virginia Woolf and her Time

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was one of the most significant female-writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She became one of the leading figures of Bloomsbury group, community of friends and artists with its base in London. The basic idea of Bloomsbury was complete neutrality, pacifism and tolerance. Its members tried to establish the whole new perception of the world and art as they were exploring the brand-new approaches towards literature and writing.

The Bloomsbury group formed the opinions and the artistic perception of every its member. They declared their sympathies to modernism which have gradually become the leading movement in literature and have influenced many contemporary writers.

Modernism was an aesthetic movement which influenced architecture, visual art, music and literature. Everything was started by Impressionism, the French school of painting in later 19<sup>th</sup> century. They refused to follow traditional and established way of painting and started to focus on emotions and feelings. The turn of the century raised the interest in psychology and human mind. It was the time when a famous Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud started to practise his therapeutic techniques such as free associations and interpretation of dreams as the tool to uncover sub-consciousness. He claimed that only with the help of these techniques the inner fears and desires can be discovered. “Freud relates reality and fantasy, dreams and memories; words are connected to their opposites and are given their proper meaning in terms of puns“ (Kampf, p. 253).

The second huge influence for the modernists was a German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche whose idea of “will to power” and nihilism had a great impact on thinking of every intellectual.

The modernists believed that the work is highly subjective and self-referential; it is demonstration of the mind of the author, totally autonomous from the classical and major middle-class culture and the collective state of mind. The language used in modernist literature often keep some level of ambiguity, it is experimental and frequently ironic.

Yet, in fact, it is hard to define the modernist ideology in general. Georg Lukács says in his ‘The Ideology of Modernism’ that:

The ideology underlying modernist writings is identical in all cases. On the contrary: the ideology exists in extremely various, even contradictory forms. The rejection of narrative objectivity, the surrender to subjectivity, may take the form of Joyce's stream of consciousness, or of Musil's 'active passivity', his 'existence without quality', or of Gide's '*action gratuite*' (Modernism, pp. 107-108).

Virginia Woolf particularly used modernist technique which is called "stream of consciousness", which is noticeable especially from her later works starting with *Mrs Dalloway*. This narrative mode has its roots in Freud's psychology and it is usually regarded as the series of associations, the logical leaps and the frequent absence of punctuation and the rules of syntax. The purpose is to record the fragmentation of human thinking, its discursiveness and non-linearity. It often takes a form of inner monologue which reflect the actions taken by a character.

Quentin Bell, nephew of Virginia Woolf, stated that Bloomsbury was very radical in the rejection of sexual taboos and its members laid stress on equality between men and women.

In this sense Bloomsbury was feminist. [...] The feminism of Bloomsbury was libertarian and, while challenging the ethics of a society which saw in the man the natural fount of power an authority, challenged also the entire system of morality on which that power was based (pp. 42-43).

The Bloomsbury members were very open concerning sexuality. These issues were vital part of their work and their real lives. The topics like homosexuality, bisexuality or adultery were rejected and disapproved by the major society and regarded as libertine or even illegal.

Woolf lived in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it was the period of changes in the society. As she wrote in her novel *Orlando*:

The great cloud which hung, not only over London, but over the whole of the British Isles on the first day of the nineteenth century stayed, or rather, did not stay, for it was buffeted about constantly by blustering gales, long enough to have extraordinary consequences upon those who lived beneath its shadow (p. 146).

This quotation clearly describes the vibe of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which was highly conservative, prudent and stereotypical. This Victorian atmosphere remained in Britain till the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the circumstances have gradually started to change. But

the Victorian era, which lasted for 64 years, set the certain stereotypes and rules for the society as the whole as well as for the individuals. During the reign of Queen Victoria, there was introduced a moral codex which bended the personal freedom especially concerning the co-existence of men and women.

Victorian sexual morality of the nineteenth century preferred traditional institution of marriage and family. In 1890s started the campaign towards the recognition of homosexuality with the contribution of an established British sexologist and psychologist Henry Havelock Ellis who published in his time controversial and revolutionary book *Sexual Inversion* (1897). However, the homosexual minority was for a long time subjected to social repression and rejection. The homosexuality was decriminalized in the United Kingdom in 1967. Before this date the homosexuals had to hide the true nature of their orientation. They often used marriage as a cover and tried to function as a traditional family.

The Bloomsbury group members were very open-minded in their perception and acceptance of homosexuality. A lot of its member identified themselves as homosexual (such as E. M. Forster) without any intolerance from the side of their colleagues.

Likewise, the position of women was very problematic: they did not have many job opportunities, they had very strict dress code and they were expected not to participate in public events.

As Andreas Huyssen stated in the essay 'Mass Culture as Woman':

It is indeed striking to observe how the political, psychological, and aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities (Modernism, p. 147).

No wonder that women started to campaign for the equal rights and gender reform. The suffrage movement can be traced from 1860s demanding a more democratic franchise and a broader reform in order to eliminate restrictions on women's educational and employment opportunities, gender pay scales, the sexual double standard and the legal authority husbands held over their wives (Smith, p. 3).

One of the most significant figures of the suffrage movement was Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), a founder of rather militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903 and the spiritual leader in the equal right to vote. Her

commitment and firmness persuaded many of the women to fight for the common interest. Pankhurst was repeatedly arrested with her members due to her radical political beliefs and involvement in numerous protests. In prison, she was involved in several hunger strikes to improve conditions and she was supported by other suffragettes in nearby cells. Therefore, the WSPU members were often subjected to force-feeding by a feeding tube through the nose or mouth into the stomach. This violent and painful practice was interdicted by the British government in 1913 by the Cat and Mouse Act.

The first success came in 1918 when came out the Representation of the People Act, which extended the vote to women aged 30 and above who were also local electors or the wives of local government electors. It was just a partial victory, because it excluded young unmarried employed women who did not own the property. The suffragettes demanded more.

The ruling Conservative Party promised to lower the age limit to 21 (and match it with the one for the enfranchised men), but the party was within divided. Some of its members would have preferred the age of 25. In a memorandum presented to the Cabinet Equal Franchise Committee on 21 February 1927, Conservative Party Central Office stated:

We believe that if the age of franchise for women was reduced to 25, it would be politically better for the Conservative Party than 21, as particularly in the North of England, a large proportion of the women of 25 would be married and, therefore, much less likely to be led astray by extravagant theories (Smith, p. 103).

Although the most of the Cabinet was for equal franchise at age 25, it was politically impossible. Thus in 1928 the Representation of the People Act reformed the election system and granted the franchise equally with men to women aged 21 and above.

Virginia Woolf expressed in her writings her sympathies towards feminism and women right's movement. With a French female-writer, Simone de Beauvoir, Woolf became the founder of the modern discussion about the position of women in the society.

In her two collections of essays *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) she stated that a difference between man and women is only a social construct, and it can be changed.

Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (1949) claimed that a female role was artificially enforced to a woman. The world around us is dominated by men and their view of the truth. The men are convinced that they are naturally superior and “in the right”, that women are irrelevant and “deficient”, because they do not have qualities preferred in the male-dominated society.

The important part of the way to full independence is, according to Beauvoir, the awakening of one’s own importance and not to be afraid to make a difference. Women should not take themselves as subordinate any longer and they should act like confident and free individuals.

The both authoresses formed the theory of gender inequality and criticized the traditional division of social roles which are not given naturally, but they are just a social construct.

## 2. The Ideal of Androgyny

As was hinted in the previous chapter, Virginia Woolf was concerned about the question of gender roles and feminism. Although, she denied the “feminist” label, she dealt with this topic systematically during her life, especially in the second half when she already was a reputable writer and essayist. She also held a few lectures at universities about feminism and female education.

She criticized the long-established social system, in which a woman has no power.

For here again we come within range of that very interesting and obscure masculine complex which has had so much influence upon the women’s movement; that deep-seated desire, not so much that *she* shall be inferior as that *he* shall be superior, not only in front of the arts, but barring the way to politics too (1929, p. 83).

Woolf was conscious about the fact that women’s access to art was restricted and usurped by men, because they blocked the way to education. She illustrated this phenomenon by the example of Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), duchess of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and one of the first female-writers who did not publish under male pseudonyms.

She should have had a microscope put in her hand. She should have been taught to look at the stars and reason scientifically. Her wits were turned with solitude and freedom. No one checked her. No one taught her. The professors fawned on her. At Court they jeered at her (1929, p. 92).

It is obvious that the women had a little chance to fulfil themselves throughout the history. Woolf admired the minority of female-writers who gained their status such as Jane Austen, sisters Brontës or George Eliot. These women had the luck that they were able to overcome the prejudices that a woman cannot participate on art. The important aspect of not becoming a female-writer was the fact that the education opportunities were limited. The first colleges which offered the education for women started to be founded in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The vibe in the society was dominated by the conviction that a woman is stupider than a man by nature. This finding came from scientific studies about human brain.

Female brain is smaller, therefore has the smaller capacity and is not likely to be capable of the advanced thinking.

The greatest achievement for a woman in the nineteenth century was a good marriage. The marriages were arranged by their parents, respectively fathers, in order to receive an heir and keep high living standard.

According to Woolf, even an educated woman had no easy life, because she had to choose between two evils. She could either obey the traditional female role in the society, or join the public world which forces her to follow the rules of the very same patriarchal society. Each of it is bad (1938, p. 135).

In *Three Guineas* Woolf denounced that when a woman wanted to pick up a career, she earned lower salary than a man, even at the same position. This fact placed a woman to inferior role in family finance and made her economically dependant to a man.

She understood that men have the different interests than women. They cannot fully understand each other. Woolf brought the topic of war as the illustration. A man protects the country and demands tolerance from a woman. But a woman does not understand, because she does not feel the national pride or patriotism. The word “country” has little meaning for her.

’Our’ country throughout the greater part of its history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share in its possession. [...] As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world (1938, p. 197).

This pacific and anti-war notion was not only typical for Virginia Woolf, but for the whole Bloomsbury group.

A woman should have another role in the society as well as in art which should not be dictated by men. Both men and women have the same abilities to realize their dreams, to take up a suitable profession and to do what they please.

Virginia Woolf criticized this male-dominated society, because she believed that women also have a lot to say, of course, in their own unique way.

It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? (Woolf, 1929, p. 132)



The literature written by men celebrates only male virtues and values and describes their world. This type of book is, according to Woolf, totally incomprehensible for a woman. But the literature should be accessible to everyone, regardless their gender, because the objective reality of the world is neither male nor female.

Virginia Woolf refused the conventional view of male and female roles and found the optimal solution in the idea of androgyny. It was the second half of the twenties, when Woolf started to occupy herself intensively by gender roles and its impact on the society. Woolf believed that the ideal human form is genderless, neither a man, nor a woman, an androgynous creature. This pseudo-gender is the result of free will or conscious choice to craft oneself (Paterek).

But Woolf did not regard the androgyny as the perfect balance of female and male part i.e. blending of both female and male elements, but as a neither of those. The greatest writers are above all gender.

It is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly and man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman. And fatal is no figure of speech; for anything written with that conscious bias is doomed to death (1929, pp. 156-157).

A writer should be free of any gender bondage, for get across his ideas fully and as objective as possible and be able to write about characters of multiple genders and backgrounds. The narrow insight of one-sex perspective limits an artist and bars him or her from the greatness. Androgyny as the state of mind opens the brand-new horizons which help to understand the different and distant aspects of life. The artist who is genderless can easily grab the reality and find the ultimate truth.

The androgyny should be regarded as the ideal state of human mind, an inner conviction rather than visible sign. The androgyny, as was understood by Woolf, was not connected with sexuality in any way or with the appearance or any other form of visual features.

This perfect harmony of male and female experience is not likely to be reached. The duality of sexes is too deep and too striking. Male mind is rational, logical, assertive, abrupt, aggressive and cynical, while female mind is sensual, emotional, calming, pacific and intuitive. It can be clearly seen that these two minds are in the almost complete opposition, thus the balance, the true middle is very complicated to find.

Roger Poole noticed one aspect of the androgyny and its factual impossibility.

It appears that Virginia herself believed (in the novels) that never the twain would meet. Indeed, she went a good deal further: she suggested that male mind and the female mind are not only incompatible, but actually hostile to each other. Not only does egoistic fact-obsessed, reductive male mind oppose the intuitive, fluid, nature-aware female mind, but it seeks to destroy that female mind if it can. [...] The male mind causes pain, embarrassment or damage to others (pp. 263-264).

Nevertheless, Virginia Woolf played with this ideal on the intellectual level. No wonder that she preferred the female qualities to male ones with the regard to her feminist attitudes, but she was convinced that a human can achieve a certain level of understanding or empathy for the other gender.

This idea was realized in her novel *Orlando*, where she tried to prove that the ideal of androgyny is the possible and realizable state of mind.

### 3. Victoria Sackville-West

This chapter is fully dedicated to the relationship of Virginia Woolf and Victoria Sackville-West. This chapter introduces the person of Vita Sackville-West, her work and life, and examines the affection between these two women with regard to their writings, especially the influence on the creation of the novel *Orlando*.

Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) was an aristocrat from the English house of Sackville. Her father Lionel Edward Sackville-West was the third Baron Sackville of Knole in the County of Kent. However, as a woman she had no hope to inherit the houses and lands. She spent her childhood in the family house of Knole in southern England. She was a very intelligent and diligent student, she was particularly interested in English history and literature, and she was fluent in French.

Although she was married to a diplomat and an ambassador Harold Nicolson, she felt that her sexual desires lie elsewhere. She started to get frequently involved into extra-marital same-sex relationships. Harold Nicolson, who was rumoured to be homosexual as well, tolerated her excesses. Nevertheless, Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson felt great affection and respect for each other. Vita Sackville-West claimed many times that Harold Nicolson is her true love, even though she knew about his affinities. Vita Sackville-West often wrote Harold Nicolson letters in which she kept convincing him about her love and very deep attachment as on 4 June 1941:

I was thinking ‘How queer! I suppose Hadji [Harold Nicolson] and I have been about as unfaithful to one another as one well could be from the conventional point of view, even worse than unfaithful if you add homosexuality, and yet I swear no two people could love one another more than we do after all these years.’

(Raitt, p. 5)

In the later years, she partly blamed him for their controversial marriage in a letter:

You were older than I, and far better informed. I was very young, and very innocent. I knew nothing about homosexuality. I didn’t even know that such a thing existed – either between men or between women. You should have told me. You should have warned me that the same sort of thing was likely to happen to myself. It would have saved us a lot of trouble and misunderstanding. But I simply didn’t know.

(Glendinning, p. 47)

However, both Woolf and Sackville-West believed in marriage as an institution and, especially Woolf, saw it as a haven of serenity and peace (Raitt, p. 4).

Vita Sackville-West became a renowned gardener and she tried to establish herself as a writer and a poet. Her first novel *Heritage*, published in 1919, was a success. Although Vita Sackville-West was very popular and reputable at her time, she did not get into sub-consciousness of the next generations. Her best-known novels such as *The Edwardians* (1930), *All Passion Spent* (1931) or poem *The Land* (1927) are now nearly forgotten. But she gained her place in the literature in another way. The one, who was responsible for Vita Sackville-West's immortality, was no one else than Virginia Woolf.

They met for the first time on 14 December 1922 when Virginia and her husband Leonard Woolf had a dinner in a house of their good friend and co-writer Clive Bell.

The next day Virginia Woolf commented this meeting in her diary:

I am too muzzy headed to make out anything. This is partly the result of dinning to meet the lovely gifted aristocratic Sackville West last night at Clive's. Not much to my severer taste – florid, moustached, parakeet coloured, with all the supple ease of the aristocracy, but not the wit of the artist. She writes 15 pages a day – has finished another book – publishes with Heinemanns – knows everybody – But could I ever know her? (1978, pp. 216-217)

Vita Sackville-West was not that astonished by Virginia Woolf as she was by her. Virginia Woolf was fascinated by her aristocratic manners.

The aristocratic manner is something like the actresses – no false shyness or modesty: a bead dropped into her plate at dinner – given to Clive [Bell] – asks for liqueur – has her hand on all the ropes – makes me feel virgin, shy, & schoolgirlish. Yet after dinner I rapped out opinions. She is a grenadier; hard; handsome, manly; inclined to double chin (1978, p. 217).

Later Virginia Woolf learned that Vita Sackville-West is openly homosexual and this fact made her person even more interesting for Woolf. As she wrote in her diary on 19 February 1923: “She is a pronounced Sapphist, & may, thinks Ethel Sands, have an eye on me, old though I am” (1978, p. 235). Even though Virginia Woolf was ten years older, she had charisma and charm; she was popular for her wit and intellect. No wonder that Vita Sackville-West gradually started to fall under her spell.

They shared the same passion for literature; nevertheless, Virginia Woolf was far more talented than Vita Sackville-West. Virginia Woolf was conscious about it, but it did not stop her for admiring Sackville-West as her muse and heroine in her fantasy.

Sackville-West's sense for duty and marriage made her follow her husband wherever he may have gone. They spent a lot of time abroad, but Sackville-West kept in touch with Woolf via letters.

Virginia Woolf adored Vita Sackville-West's maturity and courage "being so much in full sail on the high tides, where I am costing down backwaters" as can be read her diary entry on 21 December 1925 (Glendinning, p. 150). And more importantly her motherhood, which made her in Woolf's eyes "a real woman", because this completion was not possible for Virginia Woolf herself.

Virginia Woolf described her feeling towards Sackville-West as "very mixed". She commented on the whole thing in her diary:

These Sapphists *love* woman, friendship is never untinged with amorosity... I liked her & being with her, & splendour – she shines in the grocer's shop in Sevenoaks with a candle lit radiance, stalking on legs like beech trees, pink glowing, grape clustered, pearl hung. That is the secret of her glamour, I suppose. Anyhow she found me incredibly dowdy (Glendinning, p. 150).

Virginia Woolf knew that Vita Sackville-West have had several romances with other women. In the past Sackville-West left her husband with Violet Trefusis and eloped to Paris. By the time Vita Sackville-West met Virginia Woolf, this relationship was over.

As an independent intellectual with feministic attitudes, Virginia Woolf was curious about having an affair with another woman. However, it was until 1925 when they started to talk about their relationship as a romantic one.

Virginia Woolf's husband, Leonard Woolf, with whom she ceased to share a bed shortly after marriage, showed a lot of understatement for the feelings of his wife. He even left their house when Sackville-West was supposed to come in order to offer them privacy.

Virginia Woolf as a person was rather chilly, analytical and often hard to approach, very reserved and careful in expressing her emotions. Vita Sackville-West, on the other hand, was energetic, sociable and passionate. It is almost surprising how these two very

distant and nearly contradictory types of characters could go together and fancy each other.

On 20 January 1926 Vita Sackville-West left London for six weeks to travel round the world as far as to India where Harold Nicolson met her and took her with him to Teheran. It was the time when Sackville-West started to work on her novel *Passenger to Teheran*. This separation was compensated by busy and continuous correspondence. It was especially painful for Sackville-West as she wrote to Virginia Woolf in her letter on 21 January, just a day after her departure:

I am reduced to a thing that wants Virginia. I composed a beautiful to you in the sleepless nightmare hours of the night, and it has all gone: I just miss you, in a quite simple desperate human way (DeSalvo, p. 98).

Shortly after Vita Sackville-West's departure Virginia Woolf wrote about her in her diary on 19 January: "She is not clever; but abundant & fruitful; truthful too. She taps so many sources of life: repose & variety" (1980, p. 77).

Sackville-West returned to England on 16 May 1926 and her arrival was greatly awaited by Woolf. It can be read in her diary of 20 May:

Vita comes to lunch tomorrow, which will be a great amusement & pleasure. I am amused at my relations with her: left so ardent in January – & now what? Also I like her presence & her beauty. Am I in love with her? Her being 'in love' (it must be comma'd thus) with me, excites & flatters; & interests. What is this 'love'? Oh & then she gratifies my eternal curiosity: who's she seen, what's she done – for I have no enormous opinion of her poetry (1980, pp. 86-87).

Despite Sackville-West's rather open marriage, Harold Nicolson was worried about her attachment to Virginia Woolf which made him jealous. Harold Nicolson feared that the situation would be exactly the same as it was before with Violet Trefusis and he had also certain doubts about Virginia Woolf's mental health. Vita Sackville-West wrote her husband on 17 August 1926 a long letter explaining her attitude towards her relationship with Virginia Woolf and assuring him of her determination to stay in England.

You mention Virginia: it is simply laughable. I love Virginia, as who wouldn't? but really, my sweet, one's love for Virginia is a very different thing: a mental thing, a spiritual thing if you like, an intellectual thing, and she inspires a feeling of tenderness which I suppose is because of her funny mixture of hardness and

softness, - the hardness of her mind, and her terror of going mad again. [...] So you see I am sagacious, - though probably I would be less sagacious if I were more tempted, which is at least frank! [...] I *have* gone to bed with her (twice) but that's all (Glendinning, p. 165).

But Sackville-West's affinity to Virginia Woolf deepened which was partly due to another departure to Persia by the end of January 1927. Before she left, she wrote Virginia Woolf from Ebury Street on 28 January:

Beloved Virginia, one last goodbye before I go I feel torn in a thousand pieces – it is *bloody* – *I can't tell you* how I hate leaving you. I don't know how I shall get on without you – in fact I don't feel I can – you have become so essential to me. Bless you for all the happiness you give me. I'll write in the train. Bless you, my darling, my lovely Virginia (DeSalvo, p. 179).

And she added a postscript in pencil: “Put ‘honey’ when you write – Darling, please go on loving me – I am so miserable – Don't forget me –“ (DeSalvo, pp. 179-180).

Their close friendship accelerated, even though Vita Sackville-West was from time to time tempted by other women, and reached its peak during the autumn of 1927 when Virginia Woolf started to form her new novel called *Orlando*.

However, soon after its publishing their love started to fade away, the passion disappeared, but they remained good friends till Woolf's suicide on 28 March 1941 as she drowned herself to the river Ouse.

Vita Sackville-West suggested many years later in her letter to Harold Nicolson that “I still think that I might have saved her if only I had been there and had known the state of mind she was getting into” (DeSalvo, p. 474).

## 4. Orlando

This chapter deals with the novel *Orlando*. It tracks the history from the beginning to its publishing in 1928. The most significant part deals with the motifs and themes in the book, which are either Woolf's own opinions, viewpoints or other intellectual attitudes or the ones based on life and long-time friendship with Vita Sackville-West.

The relevant information about background of writing of the novel was sourced from work of Virginia Woolf, her private diary and her letters to Vita Sackville-West. The whole knowledge about life and attitudes of Woolf and Sackville-West are demonstrated on significant extracts from *Orlando* whose content was closely analyzed.

The idea of the novel *Orlando* began to invade the mind of Virginia Woolf towards the end of September 1927. As she wrote in her diary on 20 September:

One of these days, thought, I shall sketch here, like a grand historical picture, outlines of all my friends. [...] It might be a way of writing the memoirs of one's own times during peoples' lifetimes. It might be a most amusing book. [...] Vita should be Orlando, a young nobleman. [...] It should be truthful; but fantastic.  
(1980, pp. 156-157)

Just a few days later, Virginia Woolf made another diary entry on 5 October:

And instantly the usual exciting devices enter my mind: a biography beginning in the year 1500 & continuing to the present day, called Orlando: Vita; only with a change about from one sex to another (1980, p. 161).

It is clear that Woolf was determined to base her main character on her long-time friend Vita Sackville-West, but she would have liked to have a permission and assurance that Sackville-West is not offended by her idea. Therefore, she wrote Sackville-West a letter on 9 October informing her about the situation of the new novel: "But listen; suppose Orlando turns out to be Vita; and it's all about you and the lusts of your flesh and the lure of your mind. [...] Shall you mind?" (DeSalvo, p. 252)

The reply came almost immediately on 11 October:

My God, Virginia, if ever I was thrilled and terrified it is at the prospect of being projected into the shape of Orlando. What fun for you; what fun for me. You see, any vengeance that you ever want to take lie ready to your hand. Yes, go ahead, toss



up your pancake, brown it nicely on both sides, pour brandy over it, and serve hot. You have my full permission (DeSalvo, p. 252).

Nothing could be more encouraging for Virginia Woolf than this letter. She started to think about it more profoundly and form the plot and the story. She was to write in her diary on 22 October that *Orlando* should be “a small book & written by Christmas”, full of absurdity, mockery and humour, a farce, a joke for her own amusement.

Vita Sackville-West was not only the passive participant in the novel; her help was actively used by Virginia Woolf. She was, for example, requested to translate a few sentences to French, questioned about her life in more details that were later introduced into the story and even was photographed for the first edition as Orlando (Glendinning, p. 205).

*Orlando*, the story of an immortal hero/heroine who changes sex during his/her life, was finished on 22 March 1928 as Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary:

Yes it's done – Orlando – begun on 8<sup>th</sup> October, as a joke; & now rather too long for my liking. It may fall between stools, be too long for a joke, & too frivolous for a serious book (1980, p. 177).

Despite all these anxieties, *Orlando* was a very successful book which sold 8,104 copies in the first six months, which solved Woolfs' financial problems. It was also a turning point in Virginia Woolf's career because she suddenly became a well-established novelist.

The novel, which Nigel Nicolson (son of Vita and Harold Nicolson) called in *A Portrait of a Marriage* the “longest and most charming love-letter in literature” (Rose, p. 180), was not only the mock biography of the house of Sackville-West and its member Vita (to whom the whole novel was dedicated), but also expressed Woolf's feminist attitudes with the emphasis on androgyny.

For Virginia Woolf, to call her own novel “a joke” might be just a cover for including the serious aspects and not to offend anyone at the same time. *Orlando* is definitely an experimental and light-hearted book which plays with gender and time and parodies the biographical style, but it is not particularly humorous. All its satire and irony is actually sourced from the social criticism and the denial of gender roles.

These two main elements – the person of Vita Sackville-West and the idea of androgyny – were combined in the novel and created its essence. This paper tracks both themes in the novel and deals with them in details.

To begin with Orlando's family house of Blackfriars which has a clear correspondence with the mansion of Knole. Virginia Woolf knew the house and its surrounding only vicariously, but had the correct feeling that Vita Sackville-West is very fond of it. Orlando loved her home as well, developed it and fought for the right to possess it as a woman.

The story of Orlando opens during the Elizabethan times when he was sixteen. His biggest aspiration was to become a poet. He had a great amount of charm which is noticed by the Queen herself who invites him to her Court. There enters the next important motif: the Russian princess Sasha.

They met during the lavish feast held by the King James on the frozen river Thames. When Orlando saw her for the first time, he was not sure whether she was a boy or a girl, because of the fashion. But even before he knew the sex of a person, he fell passionately in love with her. When she passed him, Orlando was sure that she is a boy and "was ready to tear his hair with vexation that the person was of his own sex, and thus all embraces were out of question" (Woolf, 2004, p. 19).

This is one of the first hints of playing with gender and strict morality when it comes to same-sex relationships.

The character of princess Sasha is based on a real person (as almost every character in the book). In this case, it is Mrs Violet Trefusis with whom Sackville-West had a serious affair. Woolf sourced from Sackville-West's book called *Challenge* (1923) which told the story of love for Violet Trefusis (DeSalvo, p. 230). Orlando was very keen on Sasha, he was attracted by her and developed a profound emotional affection to her. But Sasha cheated on him with a sailor, which affected Orlando in a tragic and desperate way.

It might be surprising why Virginia Woolf let her main character, with whom she was in love, suffer and let him experience infidelity and betrayal. The answer is simpler than it seems. During their long-time close relationship Virginia Woolf was often a witness of Sackville-West's affairs with other women. Woolf was, of course, jealous, thus she decided to take revenge and let Orlando (Vita) go through exactly the same

situation and feelings, he “hurled at the faithless women all the insults that have ever been the lot of her sex. [...] He called her; devil, adulteress, deceiver” (Woolf, 2004, p. 37).

It is obvious that these words are sourced from Virginia Woolf’s own frustration and that they are not addressed to Russian princess but to Vita Sackville-West herself.

After Orlando’s return home from London, another interesting character is introduced, Roumanian Archduchess Harriet Griselda who saw a picture of Orlando in a pub and wanted to make his acquaintance. From the first appearance the reader suspects that there is something very strange in her.

Later on (after Orlando’s sex change), a reader realized that Archduchess Harriet was in fact a cross-dressed man. Archduke Harry saw a picture of Orlando and fell in love with him immediately, but he knew that the society would not accept this relationship, so he dressed himself as a woman to be close to Orlando.

Woolf tried to show the ridiculousness of the strict refusal of same-sex relationship by the society. She did not look at love of Archduke as something inappropriate or even twisted. She described his fear and despair that his love cannot be requited and the fear that the society would denounce him. Thus he had to mask his own sex (if he could not do it with his feelings) in order to act in the society-approved way.

The character of Archduke Harry refers to Lord Henry George Charles Lascelles (Glendinning, p. 203) who courted to Sackville-West, but she preferred Harold Nicolson to him. Lord Lascelles was described by Sackville-West as very timid, well-mannered, nervous, not too ugly, but he was in her opinion rather dull with a silly laugh and that he always looks terrified (Glendinning, p. 49). All the unhappiness of this unrequited love is felt from the book, especially when Archduke firstly declared his love.

As he spoke, enormous tears formed in his rather prominent eyes and ran down the sandy tracts of his long and lanky cheeks. That man cry as frequently and as unreasonably as women (Woolf, 2004, p. 115).

Even Nicolson himself is included in the novel, her husband in the real life and husband in the fiction. His character Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine is a young

traveller and sailor which reflects Nicolson's tendency to be far from home. Woolf also commented the controversy of their marriage:

She [Orlando] was married, true; but if one's husband was always sailing round Cape Horn, was it marriage? If one liked him, was it marriage? If one liked other people, was it marriage? And finally, if one still wished, more than anything in the whole world, to write poetry, was it marriage? (2004, p. 173)

#### **4.1 Feminism and Androgyny**

The central and the most fascinating part of the novel is the sex change. Becoming a woman also changes the whole attitude of the main character. During the process of sex change there came three characteristics symbolically represented by three women who came to supervise the whole sex-change: Modesty, Chastity and Purity. These qualities are traditionally associated with females.

Orlando knew that everything was about to change, that she would not be allowed to do anything which she used to as a man. As she expressed, her behaviour have to be completely different.

And that's the last oath I shall ever be able to swear [...] And I shall never be able to crack a man over the head, or tell hem he lies in his teeth, or draw my sword and run him through the body, or sit among my peers, or wear a coronet, or walk in procession, or sentence a man to death, or lead an army, or prance down Whitehall on a charger, or wear seventy-two different medals on my breast. All I can do ... is to pour out tea and ask my lords how they like it. D'you take sugar? D'you take cream? (Woolf, 2004. p. 100)

She also realized how unjust her new position as a woman is. She criticized the system of the male-dominated society by saying: "Ignorant and poor as we are compared with the other sex [...] Armoured with every weapon as they are, while they debar us even from a knowledge of the alphabet" (Woolf, 2004, p. 102). Orlando felt restricted and diminished by men which showed her their dominancy and power over the whole female kind.

There is a little secret which men share among them; Lord Chesterfield whispered it to his son with strict injunction to secrecy, "Women are but children of a larger

growth. [...] A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them, humorous and flatters them” (Woolf, 2004, p. 137).

But she came to the decision that she loved being a woman and she gave numerous reasons:

Better it is [...] to be clothed with poverty and ignorance, which are the dark garments of the female sex; better to leave the rule and discipline of the world to others; better be quit of martial ambition, the love of power, and all the other manly desires if so one can more fully enjoy the most exalted raptures known to the human spirit, which are [...] contemplation, solitude, love (Woolf, 2004, pp. 102-103).

But Orlando is not simply just a man or just a woman. There is the clear reference to her androgyny throughout the whole text. She is the “mixture of man and woman, one being uppermost and then the other” (Woolf, 2004, p. 121). This blending of male and female elements is the reason why Orlando did not have typically male or female attributes and characteristics. As stated, she is “tender-hearted”, sensitive and did not long for power, which is associated with women, on the other hand she did not care about fashion and “household matters”, she could ride a horse very well and was bold and active, which is usually attribute to men (Woolf, 2004, pp. 121-122). Woolf claims: “Whether, then, Orlando was most man or woman, it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided” (Woolf, 2004, p. 122).

Androgyny is also hinted further in the text when Orlando had already met her future husband Marmaduke Shelmerdine.

An awful suspicion rushed into both their mind simultaneously,  
“You are a woman, Shel!” she cried.  
“You are a man, Orlando!” he cried (Woolf, 2004, p. 164).

It is suggested that not only Orlando is androgynous, but Shelmerdine is as well. It is mentioned that he blush too much, almost like a woman (2004, p. 164). And there is suggestion when Orlando and Shelmerdine still doubted the sex of each other: “It was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman” (Woolf, 2004, p. 168).

While Orlando had the experience to be of both genders, she could compare the advantages and disadvantages of these two. And she came to the conclusion:

Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is very opposite of what it is above (Woolf, 2004, p. 121).

As it can be seen, one's gender is very often associated with fashion which is also usually the source of confusion, beginning with Russian princess to Archduke Harry to Orlando personally. This idea is mentioned in the very first sentence of the book: "He – for that could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it" (Woolf, 2004, p. 3).

#### **4.2 (Cross-)dressing**

According to Woolf, clothing is something what can entwine us and mislead our perception and judgment about a person. This statement is further supported in various places of the book: "Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath. It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of woman's dress and of a woman's sex" (Woolf, 2004. p. 121).

And there is also stated that if "they both worn the same clothes, it is possible that they outlook might have been the same" (Woolf, 2004. p. 121).

To be a woman in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was not without complication. Orlando faced a lot of obstacles due to her new gender. She almost lost her house of Blackfriars because as a woman she was not allowed to own any property. She was also excluded from the world of art, because it may be entered only by men who received proper education. All these conventions are ironically criticized by Woolf in order to point out its absurdity.

Orlando began to use fashion to hide her true gender and dressed herself as a man to experience the freedom of London which is not possible and acceptable for a woman. As it is said: "ladies are not supposed to walk in public places alone" (Woolf, 2004, p. 122).

She dressed herself in her old black velvet suit and before she left her home she made sure that "her petticoats had not lost her the freedom of her legs" (Woolf, 2004, p. 138). Orlando met a young girl during her first masked walk and offered her the company.

To feel her hanging lightly yet like a suppliant on her arm, roused in Orlando all the feelings which become a man. She looked, she felt, she talked like one. Yet, having been so lately a woman herself, she suspected that the girl's timidity and her hesitating answers and the very fumbling with the key in the latch and the fold of her cloak and the droop of her wrist were all put on gratify her masculinity.

(Woolf, 2004, p. 139)

The clothes played the most significant part in her later sex changes as Orlando:

found it convenient at this time to change frequently from one set of clothes to another [...] She had, it seems, no difficulty in sustaining the different parts, for her sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn one set of clothing can conceive; nor can there be any doubt that she reaped a twofold harvest by this device; the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied.

(Woolf, 2004, p. 141)

The enrichment, which this cross-gender experience brings, corresponds with the idea of Virginia Woolf about the utility of the androgyny. Nothing but the understanding the other sex and its thinking can rise us to higher level of knowledge about humanity. Androgyny opens us a brand-new world, widens our horizons and makes our life complete.

It is also stated that Orlando had a mixed sexuality and behave in a bisexual way: "For the probity of breeches she exchanged the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally" (Woolf, 2004, pp. 141-142).

This motif has the parallel to the life of Vita Sackville-West. She used to dress herself as a man when she was in Paris with Violet Trefusis. She accompanied her as her husband; they sat together in cafés and went dancing. The deceit was so believable that even newspaper-boys were calling Sackville-West "sir". Trefusis, in order to support this fallacy, called Sackville-West Julian, so the illusion was perfect (Rose, p. 178).

Virginia Woolf was without a doubt astounded by these stories of adventure and freedom, so there is no wonder that Orlando enjoyed this was of life as well. As Sackville-West wrote in *Portrait of a Marriage*: "I never appreciated anything so much as living like that with my tongue perpetually in my cheek, and in defiance of every policeman I passed" (Rose, p. 178).

### 4.3 Artistic Creativity

The story of *Orlando* is also the story about artistic creativity. Both Woolf and Sackville-West knew very well how hard it is to be a writer. Orlando herself found it difficult to get the inspiration and she longed for the perfection of her work.

Woolf expressed her attitude to literature in the world of Orlando: “And if literature is not the Bride and Bedfellow of the Truth, what is she?” (Woolf, 2004, p. 61.) and she added: “Life? Literature? One to be made into the other? But how monstrously difficult!” (Woolf, 2004, p. 186)

She believed that literature should be the reflection of life as it really is and every its aspect should be taken into consideration.

Orlando embodies Woolf’s own ambitions and wishes – to be read and appreciated. Orlando desired of fame and wanting to enter the world of art and be recognized there as a writer. This ambition followed him all his life and continued even when he became a woman. As a woman, the literary circles were closed for her for a very long time, but she never gave up hope and her dream.

Orlando’s life-long masterpiece - poem ‘The Oak Tree’ - corresponds with the poem of Vita Sackville-West called ‘The Land’ for which she won Hawthornden prize in 1927.

The prize is one of the oldest literary prizes in the UK. It was established in 1919 and since then it has been given annually to the best work of imaginative literature. It has no restriction in gender; every piece of literature can compete – from fiction, poetry and drama to biographies, journalistic texts, travel book or other non-fiction (Duffy).

*The Land* was definitely the most successful collection of poems written by Sackville-West. She was irregularly working on it since the year of 1921 and it immediately hit a great success - by 1971 it was sold more than 100,000 copies in Britain alone (Glendinning, p. 166).

Likewise, Orlando’s poem ‘The Oak Tree’ raised the attention of the critiques and the reading audience. When the poem is finished, the intensive feelings of Orlando are depicted as the mixture of excitement, relief and anxiety:

The manuscript which reposed above her heart began shuffling and beating as if it were a living thing, and, what was still odder, and showed how fine a sympathy was



between them, Orlando, by inclining her head, could make out what it was that it was saying. It wanted to be read. It must be read. It would die in her blossom if it were not read (Woolf, 2004, p. 178).

Her concerns about her poem not being read proved themselves wrong. ‘The Oak Tree’ came out in seven editions and won “Burdett Coutts” Memorial prize (Woolf, 2004, p. 204). But Orlando realized that the fame as the *raison d’être* is just a false idea, because a poet is just a charlatan (Woolf, 2004, p. 204) who has nothing in common with the art.

What has praise and fame to do with poetry? What has seven editions [...] got to do with the value of it? Was not writing poetry a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice? (Woolf, 2004, p. 213)

The novel *Orlando* follows the history of the house of Sackville and its main character refers to Vita Sackville-West. There is depicted her character, experiences, real events and other important people in Sackville-West’s life.

Nevertheless, the novel is not just a simple biography. Within, it is full of metaphors, codes and theories which are sometimes hard to detect or understand. It is the story of searching for the identity and position in the hostile world which excludes everything that does not follow its stereotypes. It is the story of change – of time, mentality, opinions - even in an issue which should be constant – of one’s gender.

The whole book is the fresco of Britain, beginning during the reign of Elizabeth I and ending in 1928, and the mirror of the society. Virginia Woolf attempted to show the women oppression by the male-dominated society throughout the time and expressed her concerns about the traditional gender roles and rejection of non-heterosexual behaviour.

Woolf also described the troubles with the writing effort and the impermanence of the inspiration and ever-lasting desire for fame and reputation. In the novel, there are several motives which deal with the general meaning of life. Orlando is often worried if his/her situation is “what people call life” (Woolf, 2004, p. 125), because he/she had the feeling that life itself is slipping through his/her fingers and that there is no point in trying to achieve something, because “all ends in death” (Woolf, 2004, p. 24). There is

also stated: “Ruin and death, [Orlando] thought, cover all. The life of man ends in grave. Worms devour us” (Woolf, 2004, p. 32).

It can be clearly seen that Woolf projected to the novel her own melancholy and depression. The few things she and Orlando ever wanted are “life and a lover!” (Woolf, 2004, p. 118)

For Virginia Woolf, writing and becoming successful was one crucial part of her life and the other was closely connected with the moment of creating the novel which is her close relationship with Vita Sackville-West. Maybe Virginia Woolf encrypts the answer what the life means to her in the word ‘life’ itself. As it is known, she was classically educated, thus she was familiar with the classical languages, such as Latin. And if there is added her tendency to play with the words and their meaning, she may suggest that the principal point in her book – life – is in fact, its Latin translation, Vita.

## **Conclusion**

Virginia Woolf was one of the most significant writers of the first half of the twentieth century and is considered to be one of the most famous and appreciated female-writers of all time. Her intellect and extraordinary talent was utilized in numerous novels, short essays, newspaper articles and reviews and in several university lectures. She did not avoid the controversial topics in her work, on the contrary, she tended to deal with them, provoke the society and criticize its organization.

As the member of Bloomsbury group, the collectivity of artists and friends, she followed its unwritten codex. The main rules in Bloomsbury group were the utter freedom of expression, pacifism and tolerance. The Bloomsbury was rather open-minded and out-spoken when it came to terms of same-sex or extra-marital relationships.

The members of Bloomsbury group declared their support for the modernist movement which emphasized unbound artistic creativity and promote the new forms, patterns and approaches to works of art.

Modernism saw art from the different perspective than the traditional point of view. Its beginnings can be dated back in the second half of nineteenth century when the school of Impressionism in France began to create their works. These painters gave emphasis on feelings which cannot be fully depicted and grabbed. Later modernists were influenced by two great thinkers – Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud and German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Especially Freud's psychoanalysis and his technique of free associations were hugely used in modernistic writings.

In literature, there was call for freedom of expression and form. The modernists stressed on the feelings, subjectivity, abstractness and fragmentariness of human mind. The typical techniques they used were free associations, stream of consciousness and inner monologues which were supposed to uncover the sub-consciousness and show how the human mind really works.

Virginia Woolf was not only a talented author, but also an intellectual and a social critique. In her writings, she often expressed her opinion about injustice in the society which excludes women and is based on bigot moral and intolerance.

Woolf became one of the founders of modern feminism (along with Simone de Beauvoir) and her theses were compiled in two collections of essays *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938). However, her critical views of male-dominated society were reflected in the majority of her works including *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Orlando* (1928).

Her feminism was partly due to a complicated epoch she lived in. The strict Victorian age was over and the society was searching for its new structure. That opened the way towards the female liberation and other forms of release. Suffrage movement achieved a great success in 1928 when women gained the equal right to vote with men. However, there were still a lot of sexual taboos (e.g. homosexuality, which was in the UK decriminalized in 1967).

Woolf's feminism was the base for her another idea and that is the idea of androgyny. Woolf was convinced that a great artist should have the androgynous mind. The androgyny can be regarded from many points of view, for example, as the perfect balance of male and female aspects of human mind. However, according to Woolf, an androgynous person is above all sex, i.e. completely genderless. This is particularly important for artists in order to understand the objective reality, to depict believable male and female characters and not to be restricted and limited by boundaries of their own sex. It is to say that this ideal was not, in her opinion, connected with the appearance or sexuality.

On the other hand, Woolf was conscious about the fact that this ideal state of mind is not likely to be reached, because female and male minds are different, or even contradictory. In general, women are sensitive, intuitive and emotional, whereas men are analytical, aggressive and cynical. With regard to Woolf's feministic attitudes, there is no wonder that she preferred female qualities and criticized the male ones, yet she was convinced that a human should reach at least the basic level of comprehension and understanding for the other sex.

In 1922, Virginia Woolf met ten-year younger Victoria (or Vita) Sackville-West, an aristocrat and a poet, and they formed a very close relationship around 1925. Sackville-West was outspoken about her homosexuality, even though she was married to the ambassador Harold Nicolson (who was rumoured to be homosexual as well). Even

though their marriage was full of scandals and infidelities, they felt great respect and affinity to each other.

Woolf was almost immediately charmed by Sackville-west's aristocratic manners and sociability, Sackville-West admired Woolf's intelligence and wit. Despite the differences in their characters (Woolf was quite reserved while Sackville-West was careless and light-hearted), they shared the same passion for literature and intellectual disputes, and thus they got along very well.

Even though Sackville-West spent lot of her time on travels, they built a strong friendship via letters. Virginia Woolf took their close fondness as a source of new experiences and inspiration. Woolf found the life of Sackville-West fascinating and full of little adventures. She was attracted by Sackville-West's independence and courage so much that she decided to write a book based on her personal story and character.

*Orlando*, which came out in 1928, was approved and dedicated to its model – Vita Sackville-West. Her life is reflected in the novel with references to other people close to her (such as her husband Harold Nicolson or her ex-girlfriend Violet Trefusis). The information about these minor characters in the novel was sourced by Woolf either from the personal meeting or from the stories told by Sackville-West.

Sackville-West played the important role during the book's creation itself. She was informed that she will be the main character of the novel and she gladly participates on its writing. She was often asked for details of the particular situation or person and for the translation of some parts of the book into French.

*Orlando* is the mixture of Virginia Woolf's own opinion concerning art, position of women and sexuality and of the life story of her close friend Vita Sackville-West. These two principal motives cannot be separated because they are bound together. Orlando had the same characteristics and experiences as Sackville-West, but she expressed Woolf's feministic attitudes by criticizing patriarchal society and tried to establish herself as a respectable writer.

The novel, beginning in the Elizabethan times and ending in 1928, is not only a mock biography of its main character – an immortal hero/heroine Orlando, but also the fresco of the history of Britain and the house of Sackville-West. The history is seen very critically with the strong feministic notion. There is often expressed how unjust and

unequal the position of women is and how women are persecuted and bounded by male-dominated society for no good reason.

The character of Orlando was clearly androgynous not only because he/she suffered sex-change, but also because after it she did not feel exclusively feminine or masculine. Analogically, Sackville-West struggled with her sexuality and faced the lack of understanding of the society.

However, Orlando is not the only androgynous character in the novel. Playing with gender and its ambiguity is commonly expressed throughout the book. The masquerades with gender are often associated with fashion. The clothing is seen as the only difference and distinction between sexes.

Last but not least topic covered in the novel concerns the world of art, creativity and general meaning of life. Orlando wishes to become a respected artist and this desire can be tracked during the whole novel. Finally, Orlando's long poem 'The Oak Tree' came out and turned to be successful. The poem is linked to Sackville-West's poem 'The Land' for which she received Hawthornden prize in 1927. The fame which is connected with the successes is, however, regarded as meaningless because everything is to disappear and end in vain. This notion of impermanence and bleakness of life is connected with Woolf's personal fears and melancholy, which accompanied her all her life.

To conclude, the novel Orlando is the reflection of the epoch when it was written. It was influenced by the struggles in the society, especially by the growing power of feministic movement, and by changes in personal life of its author, Virginia Woolf, namely by the close relationship with Vita Sackville-West.

## Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá postavou spisovatelky Virginie Woolf, jejími feministickými názory a postoji, a zvláště pak jednou kapitolou v jejím životě, která započala v roce 1922, kdy se seznámila s šlechtičnou a básnířkou Victorií Sackville-West (známou především jako Vita Sackville-West), a která skončila v roce 1928, kdy vyšel román inspirovaný právě zmíněnou Sackville-West s názvem *Orlando*. Tato práce si klade za úkol popsat dobu, kdy román vznikal, myšlenkové postoje a názory autorky románu Virginie Woolf a také podrobně zmapovat její vztah s Vitou Sackville-West a jak se tato jejich náklonnost projevila v knize a jak se v ní odrazila samotná osobnost Vity Sackville-West.

Počátek 20. století se ještě nesl ve znamení doznívající přísné Viktoriánské morálky, která trvala celkem 64 let. Zvláště postavení žen ve společnosti nebylo zdaleka ideální. Ženy se prakticky nesměly angažovat ve společenském, politickém ani uměleckém životě, nesměly vlastnit majetek a považovalo se za velmi nevhodné, když chodily do zaměstnání. Žena byla v podstatě zredukována na jakýsi doplněk muže, kterému měla akorát zajišťovat potomstvo. Postupem času se však prolomovala společenská tabu a sociální nespravedlnosti. Na síle začalo nabírat hnutí za ženská práva vedené Emmeline Pankhurstovou (1858-1928). Tato vcelku militantní feministka byla hlavní hnací silou kampaně za volební právo žen a byla mnohokrát zatčena za pořádání demonstrací. Její úsilí však přineslo úspěch, protože v roce 1928 získaly ženy nad 21 let rovné všeobecné hlasovací právo, které bylo před tím výsadou pouze mužů.

Striktní a pruderní ovzduší ve společnosti se také projevovalo k přístupu k sexuálním menšinám. Homosexualita v Británii byla trestná až do roku 1967. Ve společenských kruzích bylo, zvláště na počátku století, toto téma přísné tabu a homosexualita samotná byla pokládána za cosi nepřijatelného až zvrhlého.

To ovšem neplatilo pro takzvanou Bloomsbury Group, společenství umělců a přátel se svojí základnou v Londýně. Mnoho z nich (jako například E. M. Forster) se se svými homosexuálními sklony netajili a dokonce o nich otevřeně pojednávali ve svých dílech. Členové Bloomsbury Group se přihlásili k modernistickému hnutí, které proklamovalo nové a neotřelé přístupy k umění a literatuře.

Modernismus má své kořeny v druhé polovině 19. století. Za zakladatele modernismu se považuje francouzská malířská škola impresionistů v čele s Claudem Monetem. Ti jako první začali k umění přistupovat zcela novým způsobem, kladli důraz na subjektivitu a citovou stránku člověka a absolutní svobodu uměleckého projevu. Časem modernismus pronikl i do jiných uměleckých odvětví, do hudby a hlavně do literatury. Pozdější modernisté navazovali na práci dvou významných myslitelů – rakouského psychologa Sigmunda Freuda a německého filozofa Friedricha Nietzscheho. Zvláště freudovská metoda volných asociací byla v psaní hojně využívána s cílem dostat se do podvědomí a ukázat, jak lidská mysl skutečně funguje.

K hlavním zásadám Bloomsbury Group patřila, mimo snahy o experimentální umění, také neutralita, tolerance, pacifismus a důraz na rovnost všech lidí, tudíž i rovnoprávnost mužů a žen.

Virginia Woolf byla těmito myšlenkami značně ovlivněna. Sama ve svých dílech využívala modernistickou techniku „proud vědomí“ a vnitřního monologu. Také se zde položily základy jejím feministickým názorům, které plně vyjádřila ve svých pozdějších sbírkách esejů *Vlastní pokoj (A Room of One's Own, 1929)* a *Tři Guineje (Three Guineas, 1938)*. V nich se zabývala sociálními nespravedlnostmi a konstrukcí společenských rolí, které přisuzují ženě podřadnou a pasivní funkci. Společně se Simone de Beauvoir položila základy modernímu feminizmu.

Řešení otázek genderu přivedlo Virginii Woolf k ideálu androgynie. Woolf věřila, že cesta k velikosti umělce vede pouze skrz androgynii. Tento ideál však pro ni nebyl spojením mužských a ženských prvků v perfektní rovnováze, jako spíše oproštění se od pout pohlaví celkově. Woolf tvrdila, že náš pohled na svět je omezen naším pohlavím, které nám zabraňuje vidět věci objektivně a v širších souvislostech. Naproti tomu si Virginia Woolf uvědomovala, že takového stavu mysli není snadné dosáhnout, jelikož ženská a mužská mysl je naprosto odlišná, téměř by se dalo říci, že protikladná. Ženy jsou obecně jemné, emocionální, intuitivní a pečující, kdežto muži jsou v globále racionální, logičtí, asertivní a cyničtí. S přihlédnutím k feministickým postojům Woolf je jasné, že dávala (zvláště ve svých literárních počinech) přednost ženským kvalitám a mužské kritizovala. Přesto byla přesvědčena, že by člověk měl dosáhnout alespoň základního stupně porozumění a pochopení pro druhé pohlaví.



V roce 1922 nastala událost, která výrazně ovlivnila život Virginie Woolf a vznik románu *Orlando*, a tou bylo setkání s Vitou Sackville-West. Poprvé se poznaly na večeři u společného přítele Cliva Bella a Virginia Woolf byla téměř okamžitě okouzlena jejími aristokratickými zvyky a společenským chováním. Sackville-West se nikdy netajila svou homosexualitou (ačkoli byla provdána za vyslance Harolda Nicolsona a měla s ním dva syny), což Woolf zajímalo a lákalo. Jejich intenzivní a blízký vztah začal kolem roku 1925, přestože Sackville-West trávila mnoho času na cestách kvůli povinnostem svého manžela, ale svůj vztah udržovaly pomocí dopisů. Vše vyvrcholilo v roce 1928, kdy vyšel román inspirovaný životem Vity Sackville-West *Orlando*. Bohužel potom jejich vztah začal pomalu chladnout, postupem času se z něj vytratila tělesná přitažlivost, avšak obě spisovatelky zůstaly přítelkyněmi až do smrti Virginie Woolf v roce 1941.

Román *Orlando* v sobě spojuje dva hlavní prvky, které byly v životě Virginie Woolf důležité, a to její feministické postoje a myšlenky s návazností na androgynii a osobnost Vity Sackville-West, které je celý román věnován. Obsahuje však i spoustu vedlejších motivů, jakými jsou zamyšlení nad významem slávy a života a také nad přístupem k umění.

Práce na románu začaly na podzim roku 1927. Mělo se jednat o drobný odpočinkový román, vtip určený k pobavení jeho autorky. Vita Sackville-West nebyla však jen pasivním pozorovatelem, o úmyslu Virginie Woolf napsat o ní román věděla a byla několikrát požádána o drobnou výpomoc (například s překlady do francouzštiny), o bližší popis nějaké události v jejím životě nebo se dokonce nechala fotit pro první vydání *Orlanda* jako jeho skutečná hlavní postava. Román *Orlando* vyšel v roce 1928 a zaznamenal veliký úspěch, který vyřešil finanční problémy Woolfových, a proslavil Virginii Woolf jako spisovatelku.

Román, který začíná v době Alžběty I. a končí v roce 1928, je nejen působivou freskou Británie a jejího společenského vývoje, ale taky dává prostor k vyjádření feministických myšlenek a sociální kritice. Jeho hrdina Orlando, který v průběhu románu projde změnou pohlaví na ženu, je založen na Vitě Sackville-West, jejích zážitcích a historii jejího šlechtického rodu. V knize se dají vystopovat jasné shody s životem Sackville-West a Orlandou, stejně jako jiných postav z jejího života (Orlandin

manžel Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmardine odpovídá jejímu skutečnému manželovi Harlodu Nicolsonovi).

Nejjasněji to však lze pozorovat na epizodě, v níž se Orlanda převléká za muže, aby si užila svobody londýnských ulic, jelikož v té době nebylo ženám dovoleno chodit ven bez doprovodu. Tato zápleтка je založena na skutečné události v životě Sackville-West, která se taktéž přestrojovala, když byla v Paříži s jednou z řady svých milenek Violet Trefusis, aby si spolu mohly bez obav užívat nočního života.

Z románu je zřetelně cítit kritika patriarchální společnosti, která ženu omezuje a odstavuje ji z veřejného života. Společnost ve všech dobách preferovala mužské kvality nad ženskými a odpírala ženám rovnoprávnost, vzdělání a jiné formy seberealizace a přisuzuje jim určité a omezené společenské role.

Dalším motivem je androgynie. Postava Orlanda je v tomto případě ideální, jelikož má zkušenosti být obojím a dokáže vidět rozdíly. Ve skutečnosti je Orlando androgynní, protože nemá výrazně ženské ani mužské rysy a vlastnosti. Dospívá k přesvědčení, že se pohlaví navzájem prolínají a že jediné, co je odlišuje je oblečení, které mají na sobě.

Posledním důležitým tématem je umění, inspirace, proces tvorby a život samotný. Orlando se již v mládí snaží stát úspěšným básníkem a častokrát se melancholicky zamýšlí nad životem a významem slávy. Později jako ženě se situace ještě komplikuje, jelikož svět umění pro ni kvůli pohlaví není přístupný. Nakonec se jí však podaří uspět se svou básní, která odkazuje na báseň Vity Sackville-West, *The Land*, za kterou získala významnou literární cenu Hawthorden v roce 1927. Virginia Woolf do těchto míst promítla svoje naděje stát se významnou spisovatelkou a zanechat po sobě nějaké slavné dílo, i své obavy z budoucnosti a z toho, jestli má život vůbec nějaký smysl.

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