

“Give us also the Right to our Existence!”
Explorations of Gender Identity in the Early
20th Century as Portrayed in Virginia
Woolf’s *Orlando* and Radclyffe Hall’s *The
Well of Loneliness*

Ymke Bruinsma

4045580

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U.Wilbers

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Signed

Name of student:

Ymke Bruinsma

Student number:

4045580

Abstract

In the early twentieth-century, researchers such as Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebing wrote about a phenomenon they called sexual inversion. This was the study of homosexuals who identified as the opposite sex. The idea of a sexual invert was also adopted by a number of writers, such as Radclyffe Hall, who herself identified as a congenital invert. She was a lesbian who preferred masculine clothing. The protagonist, Stephen Gordon, in her novel *The Well of Loneliness* is born a girl, but grows up as a little boy, because of her parents who had expected to have a son. In later life, Stephen identifies herself as a lesbian and an invert, because she does not want to wear feminine clothing and resents her feminine body. Woolf also wrote about a person whose sexuality and gender is deviated from the norm in *Orlando*. Orlando is a man who halfway through the book turns into a woman and thus experiences life both as a man and a woman, coming to the conclusion that a character that is a combination of both male and female aspects would make a better-developed person.

Keywords

Virginia Woolf; *Orlando*; Radclyffe Hall; *The Well of Loneliness*; Richard von Krafft-Ebing; *Psychopathia Sexualis*; Havelock Ellis; *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*; Sigmund Freud; gender identity; sexual identity; (sexual) inversion

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Introduction

Over the late-twentieth century and the 21st century, fashion for women has changed dramatically. Recent fashion trends have shown that women tend to dress more and more unisex nowadays. Katherine Wilkinson, a journalist who specialises in gender and sexuality, writes that women supposedly favour this, as they “would benefit from never having to consider what a man thought of their clothes” (Wilkinson 2015). The term unisex dates from the 1960s, yet it can be argued that women started wearing ‘masculine’ clothing as early as the late-nineteenth century, during the Victorian dress reform; a movement of the late Victorian Era in which women proposed and wore clothing that was considered more comfortable than the fashion of the time (Kesselman 495). However, because of the prevalent view of the role of women in society, they believed in “fixed gender identities and enormous differences – physical, psychological, and intellectual – between men and women” (Crane 342), thus not many women supported the dress reform.

In the early 21st century, women often dress in a unisex style that has been dubbed ‘butch chic’ in Wilkinson’s article. She argues that it used to be a style only lesbian women would wear, yet with many celebrities such as Tilda Swinton, Kristen Stewart, and Emma Watson often dressing this way, it has now become a trend for all women. This is not necessarily because these women want to be masculine, but because they “don’t necessarily aspire to a supposed male ideal of what looks cute” (2015). Wilkinson also says: “It’s now impossible to infer a sexual orientation from the way a woman dresses” (2015), which was not always the case for women.

As stated, the trend probably originated with women who did not want to dress feminine, out of convenience, and to convey a sense of identity. These reasons could also be applied to the main character of the early twentieth-century novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). In this novel, female protagonist Stephen Gordon feels uncomfortable in dresses, and

does not like to be feminine in general, and from a very young age wears masculine clothing. This is also encouraged by her father, who had rather had a son. He lets her wear breeches during horse riding, finding that she cannot ride side-saddle, and as soon as she is able, she buys herself suits, ties, and finds ways to defeminise herself as much as possible.

Stephen Gordon is an example of a so-called 'sexual invert', because she did not conform to society's strict rules concerning gender roles. Her gender identity was not consistent with her biological sex, a phenomenon researched by contemporary psychologists such as Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebing. Ellis was co-author of *Sexual Inversion* (1897), a book that describes homosexuality and sexual practices, without condemning it as a disease or crime. This went strongly against the popular opinion that classified homosexuality as a disease. Though Ellis mainly discussed male homosexuality, the book was probably read by Radclyffe Hall, an invert herself, who used it in *The Well of Loneliness*. It is one of the books Stephen's father reads to better understand his daughter's psyche. Another study that was used in the novel was Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), in which he researched sexual inversion and came to the conclusion that sexual inversion was a biological anomaly in the brain that originated in the foetal stage. A further explanation will follow in chapter one.

Another novel that challenges gender norms is Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), a pseudo-historical biography in which the main character transitions from a man to a woman. The novel raises questions about gender, gender identity, and sexual identity, and is riddled with lesbian connotations and explores the relation between gender identity and sexual identity. A main theme in *Orlando* is the supposed difference between the genders. Orlando experiences a sex change, arguably the most important scene in the novel. After she has become a woman, she does not feel or act any different than before. Woolf suggests here that gender is not biological, but a societal construct.

These different views that both novels convey regarding the relationship between gender identity and sexual identity are still heavily debated. Even in the 21st century, women keep challenging gender roles and their gender identity. For example, lesbian women do not necessarily bear the characteristics researchers of the late-nineteenth century associated with lesbianism, such as short hair and masculine clothing. Nowadays, a lesbian can identify as feminine as well, conforming to gender norms, for example by a preference for wearing dresses or long hair. Because of this difference between gender identity and sexual identity (the fact that you do not have to be a man, or masculine, to love a woman sexually), it would be interesting to research how gender identity and sexual identity was viewed by Virginia Woolf and Radclyffe Hall, who wrote their novels in the early twentieth century. Ellis's and Krafft-Ebing's studies have had an influence on their views on sexuality, and on the view on homosexuality in general society of the 1920s. Even though Woolf does not explicitly say that Orlando is a homosexual, the character does experience a sex change from a man to a woman, while still loving the same woman. It seems to convey that love transcends gender, and that someone's sexual identity is not defined by their biological sex, whereas Hall does the opposite in her novel. Stephen is a woman, in love with another woman. Hall's explanation is sexual inversion, which means to Hall that Stephen actually is a man in a woman's body. Though both authors had very different views on gender identity, they were both addressing the issue of sexual identity in relation to gender identity. Both novels were published in 1928, and though Hall and Woolf had different approaches to the subject, a comparative research of *The Well of Loneliness* and *Orlando* will show how both authors viewed female homosexuality and the relation to gender identity.

In the first chapter, I will explain the theories of Ellis and Krafft-Ebing, and show how they relate to the novels. I will also give a historical background of the period in which the books were written and published. In the second chapter I will use the ideas of the

researches discussed in chapter one to discuss how Hall used these views in her novel and in writing her main character Stephen, who is portrayed as a sexual invert because she wears men's clothing and loves women rather than men, who repulse her. The third chapter will show the different stance that Virginia Woolf took in her novel *Orlando*, in which she explored sexuality and gender from a contrasting viewpoint. Orlando changes from a man to a woman, yet still loves the same person. Woolf would imply with this that love can reach across gender boundaries. Analysing the main characters of the novels *Orlando* and *The Well of Loneliness* will show how both authors deal with a character who experiences a deviated gender identity from the norm of the time, which they write about it in a very different way.

Chapter 1 – The Early Twentieth Century: A Historical Background of Social Change,
Sexology, and Psychology

In this chapter, I will introduce the theories of Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and Sigmund Freud, three influential researchers of sexology, and show how their works relate to the novels *The Well of Loneliness* and *Orlando*, which I will discuss in the following chapters. But first, I will give a historical background of the period in which these books and researches were written and published because it was a period defined by its changes, most of them because of World War I and its aftermath, and the developments in research about psychiatry and sexology.

1.1 – Social Change During and After World War I

At the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, women experienced change in virtually every aspect of their lives, both in the domestic and public sphere. Women's organisations, such as the Suffragettes who advocated voting rights for women, were founded. These movements were primarily concerned with achieving political equality for women. In 1903, the Pankhurst family formed the WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union), which actively advocated voting rights for women in Britain. Even though their street protests and hunger strikes kept their cause high-profile, they let the protests escalate into acts of arson and violence, and therefore lost many of their supporters. The protests presented an entirely different perspective on women, who used to be viewed as fragile, timid, silent, and domestic.

Even though the Suffragette movement was suspended during and after the First World War, women achieved voting rights for women over 30 in 1918. This was because of the social shifts that occurred during the First World War, when women were required to take over the work force that was previously dominated by men. Many women used to have to work in factories or in domestic service for another household. Now, they started working

more and more as teachers, shop clerks, and secretaries, for example (funnily enough, these jobs are now regarded as 'women's jobs'). Women also contributed to the war effort by working in factories producing bullets and shells, tram-driving, and welding (Adie 2015). After the war, though attitudes regarding female capabilities had changed, the "social system relaxed back into its Edwardian balanced state" (Hupfer 327). Most of the female workers lost their jobs to returning soldiers, as many believed that a woman's place was in the home, as it had been before the war. Some companies employed both men and women, as women received lower wages, though this did not last long, as women did not accept doing the same job as men for less pay. In 1918, women working on the buses and trams in London went on strike, asking for equal pay. Many other women in other cities followed, and it was the first strike in the United Kingdom initiated, led, and won, by women (Adie 2015).

Nevertheless, employers did not believe that women were as productive as men, despite the fact that they did precisely that during the war. Many women were forced out of their jobs after the war, and pushed back into their old role of housewife. Women who refused to leave their jobs were actually met with public outrage. Nevertheless, there were two victories for women after the war: first, the Representation of the People Act in 1918, which gave women over the age of 30 the right to vote, and second: the instalment of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, which made it illegal to exclude women from jobs based on their gender (Adie 2015). After over a decade of campaigning, the Suffragette movement finally received some recognition for their cause. However, only women who were over the age of 30 were allowed to vote, as opposed to men, who could vote when 21 years old (Adie 2015). It would be another decade before the Representation of the People Act (1928) was amended so that all people over the age of 21 were allowed to vote in the United Kingdom.

A number of women were active in the creative field in the early 20th century, as writers and artists. Women's writing concerned itself more with feminine images and themes than earlier work, such as sexual politics, and female identity in a changing world. Influential women writers were Gertrude Stein, Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and – of course – Radclyffe Hall and Virginia Woolf, the two writers discussed in this paper.

1.2 – Sexologists, Psychologists, and Psychoanalysts

The early twentieth century was also the era in which psychology and psychoanalysis made a great leap in the research on the differences between sex, sexuality, and gender. The Englishman Havelock Ellis and Austro-Germans Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Sigmund Freud were at the forefront of this research. Sexology was a major part of research about the human psyche, as it was the interdisciplinary study of human sexuality, sexual interests, and sexual behaviour; subjects that gained much interest in the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The sexual repression of the Victorian era moved towards a more liberated and emancipated sexuality, especially in England and Germany. Sexology combined biology, medicine, psychology, sociology, and criminology. The latter one is particularly interesting as homosexuality was still seen as illegal, immoral and unnatural, something Havelock Ellis contests in his research.

One of the leading German physicians was Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), who founded the Berlin Institute for Sexology in 1919. This library was used by many people who benefited from it by getting a better understanding of their own sexuality. Sadly, this progress ended with the arrival of the Nazi regime, who found the books un-German, which resulted in most of them being burned in 1933. Hirschfeld and Ellis challenged Krafft-Ebing's ideas on homosexuality and its causes.

Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) was a physician and writer, and considered the English founding father of sexology. Ellis challenged perspectives sexual taboos, regarding masturbation, homosexuality, transgenderism and sexual inversion. In his book *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897), the first English medical textbook on homosexuality, he describes sexual relations between men, which he did not characterise as a disease, immoral, or a crime. This was a revolutionary standpoint at the time. He also argued that homosexuality was innate, that people were born into their sexual orientation (Ellis 226). This was a radical idea as well, as most sexual theorists maintained that homosexuality was a sexual perversion or the result of masturbation (Robinson 30). Even though Ellis stated that homosexuality is as common among women as it is among men, he devoted only one chapter of his research to female homosexuality, and only six of the case histories (histories XXXIV – XXXIX) (Ellis 186-204). He was also a pioneer in transgenderism, which he characterised as distinct from homosexuality. Before, many thought that homosexuality and transvestism were interlinked. This meant that researchers thought that when a man characterised as a homosexual, he was really a woman, and thus transgender. Ellis stated that this does not have to be the case, and he “distinguished between sexual inversion (gender role) and homosexuality (sexual-object choice). While he found “a very pronounced tendency among sexually inverted women to adopt male attire when practicable,” he also found not all transvestites were sexual inverts” (Taylor 263).

Though his case histories emphasised characteristics such as “a lesbian’s mannish walk, love of hunting, or childhood tomboyishness” (Fassler 242), he also stated that not all homosexuals show such traits associated with the opposite sex. He describes a group of women who were not inverted, but were likely to reciprocate advances from other women. Ellis states: “they are not repelled or disgusted by lover-like advances from persons of their own sex. They are not usually attractive to the average man, [...] [they] still possess many

excellent qualities, and they are always womanly” (Ellis 185-186). Ellis is probably deliberately vague here, as he undermines his own view on lesbians, saying that these women are not ‘real’ lesbians, and will eventually marry a man. These ‘womanly lesbians’ disturbed Ellis’ theories of congenital homosexuality, yet he did not research this further (Taylor 263). An example of this is Stephen’s lover in *The Well of Loneliness*, the young, sweet, and kind Mary, who falls in love with Stephen but is eventually persuaded to marry a man to spare her a life of loneliness and despair. It shows that Ellis’ influential research had reached Radclyffe Hall as well, as she referred to herself as a sexual invert, and wrote about them in two of her books, *Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself* (1926), and *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), the latter of which will be discussed in chapter two. A researcher whom Hall calls by name in the book is Richard von Krafft-Ebing, whose study Stephen finds in her father’s study after his death.

Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) was an Austro-German psychiatrist and the author of *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), one of the first studies on sexual behaviour, homosexuality and bisexuality. Krafft-Ebing stated in the preface that it was a reference book specifically for psychiatrists, physicians, and judges, written in an academic style to discourage the lay from reading the study (Krafft-Ebing vii). Krafft-Ebing proposed in *Psychopathia Sexualis* four categories of cerebral neuroses (Krafft-Ebing 52): Paradoxia, in which sexual desire occurs at the wrong time, for example when you are still a child, or of old age; Anaesthesia, where there is a complete lack of sexual instinct; Hyperaesthesia, which means there is “an abnormally increased impressionability of the *vita sexualis* to organic, psychical and sensory stimuli”; and lastly Paraesthesia, or a perversion of sexual instinct, for example to inappropriate stimuli. Sadism, masochism, and fetishism fall under this category, according to Krafft-Ebing.

Krafft-Ebing believed that homosexuality was a form of sexual perversion, because he thought that procreation was the only purpose of sexual intercourse, and homosexual sex can

never produce a child (Krafft-Ebing 79). Krafft-Ebing also believed that homosexuality was caused by masturbation, which he explains thus: “Nothing is so prone to contaminate [...] the source of all noble and ideal sentiments, which arise of themselves from a normally developing sexual instinct, as the practice of masturbation” (Krafft-Ebing 287). Even though the primary focus of the study was on sexual behaviour in men, there are sections in the book called Sadism in Women (Krafft-Ebing 125-129), Masochism in Women (186-195), and Lesbian Love (594-607). In the latter, Krafft-Ebing discusses the origins of lesbian love, which is, according to him, most common in penal institutions for females, and among prostitutes. Krafft-Ebing also addressed the underrepresentation of women in sexology: “science must at least for the present time be content with mere conjectures. [...] Details will come to our knowledge only when medical women enter into the study of this subject” (Krafft-Ebing 23). However, this does not mean that Krafft-Ebing was a supporter of feminism. Krafft-Ebing solely made an argument for female sexuality because he found the law unfair. Sex between men was illegal in the whole of the German Realm, but the law does not mention sex between women.

An issue with *Psychopathia Sexualis* is that he uses literary references, from de Sade to Shakespeare, to substantiate some of his arguments (Schaffner 479). Anna Schaffner states:

His theoretical framework is constructed around a large number of individual case studies taken from a variety of sources: scientific works by his predecessors, medical, anthropological, psychiatric, and forensic archives, observations by medical colleagues, confessional accounts by concerned parties, empirical observations from his own practice, and, somewhat surprisingly, works of fiction. (483)

Krafft-Ebing believed that if an author wrote about a sexual phenomenon in a work of fiction, that there is an element of truth to it. He adds quotes from writers such as Flaubert and

Diderot (Krafft-Ebing 396). Likewise, literature is quoted often as a catalyst of sexual perversion in the case studies, such as in case 9; wherein the patient is said to read a lot of Jean Paul (Krafft-Ebing 65), or case 15, which describes a man who raped and murdered a little girl, and had an “obscene poem” on him (Krafft-Ebing 89). Krafft-Ebing uses case studies to give his patients a voice, and a platform to see for themselves that they were not alone in their predicaments (Schaffner 481). This is also expressed in *The Well of Loneliness* by Stephen Gordon and her father, who both read the book to better understand her psyche and also to see that she is not the only one who is experiencing sexual inversion. These sexologists have been of most influence and inspiration to Radclyffe Hall, who most likely read both their works and used them in *The Well of Loneliness*.

Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, was an acquaintance of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). However, she did not agree at all with the concepts on sexuality he proposed in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). Freud was often named the father of psychoanalysis, and was a doctor of medicine at the University of Vienna in 1881. He developed a redefinition of sexuality, including the Oedipus and Elektra Complex, and the existence of libido. His theory of sexuality consisted of five stages, as published in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. These stages consist of the oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital, which develop as the child develops. Thus, the oral stage occurs during infancy, and the genital stage occurs when the child has reached adulthood. Freud reasoned that sexual perversion could be explained by a fixation on one of the phases, or a bad experience during one. Freud’s theories made that Krafft-Ebing’s are now largely forgotten, because he defined homosexuality as a psychological problem, not a physical one. In *Orlando*, Woolf plays with the notion of homosexuality, displaying sexuality as something fluid, not rigid. Androgyny is an important aspect of sexuality for Woolf. In her eyes, men and women are not completely

masculine or feminine, but rather a mixture of the two sexes. Furthermore, homosexuality is neither a physical nor a psychological problem that has to be cured.

Neither Krafft-Ebing nor Ellis did extensive research on female homosexuality. Lesbians were either not mentioned, or were paralleled to male homosexuals. Ellis had only six examples of female homosexuality in his investigation, which he drew from his wife's friends (Vicinus 484), (Ellis' wife was bisexual and they were in an open marriage), and as well as Krafft-Ebing, he described lesbians by their masculinity, such as smoking and wearing comfortable, masculine clothing (Vicinus 484).

Nevertheless, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and Sigmund Freud had a profound influence on the writing of Virginia Woolf and Radclyffe Hall. Ellis argued that inversion could not be cured, that it was not even a disease, and this was exactly why Hall and Woolf became fascinated with the idea. He only explained his views on homosexuality, without trying to "vilify inverts nor argue for cures". Even Hall's own yearning to wear masculine clothing and call herself John (Taylor 263), was explained by Ellis. Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* was considered the best-known lesbian novel in English. Woolf's *Orlando* challenged the ideas proposed by the sexologists by having her main character experience a sex change. Though at the time it did much for the increase of visibility of lesbians in Britain, it is often criticised for its imagery of inverts leading a life of self-hatred and disapproval from society. In the following chapter, I will discuss Hall's characterisation of the female invert in *The Well of Loneliness*.

Chapter 2 – The Gender Identity of Stephen Gordon in *The Well of Loneliness*

The Well of Loneliness serves as an interpretation of the ideas of the sexologists described in chapter one. Lesbianism had become increasingly more visible in society since World War I, yet it was still a subject many people had either never heard of or chose to ignore. *The Well of Loneliness* made it a subject of conversation in society for the first time in history, owing much to the theories of Havelock Ellis, who had designed a model of sexual inversion that functioned “in the normative sexological and legal discourse” (Parkes 436) in which Hall situated *The Well of Loneliness*. Radclyffe Hall became the face of inversion, and all women who dressed the way Hall dressed came under new scrutiny. However, Hall’s style of dress was not uncommon in the 1920s: many women had short hair, and dressed in tailored jackets and skirts, a style described as ‘severely masculine’. Even before, in the nineteenth century and earlier, women dressed as men for a number of economic and sexual reasons. They often wanted the same rights as men, such as voting rights or higher wages, and were prepared to give up their female identity for this.

2.1 – The Life of Radclyffe Hall

Marguerite Radclyffe Hall (1880–1943), better known by her middle name, or her nickname John, was born in Bournemouth to a bad-tempered mother and a philandering father. Hall’s father was not present at her birth, and a few weeks after her birth, he left the family for good (Baker 7). Hall was an unwanted child, and her mother and stepfather did not pay much attention to her. This is reflected in most of her major works; she often wrote about children growing up without fathers (Joan in *The Unlit Lamp*), without maternal love (Lady Anna in *The Well of Loneliness*), and to whom instead the servants are the source of affection (Puddle in *The Well of Loneliness*) (Baker 18). At eighteen years of age, she still lived at home, the subject of her mother’s abuse. Her mother often hit Hall, mostly because Hall refused to wear the feminine dresses her mother wanted her to wear, preferring plain skirts

and blouses. When she turned 21, she inherited a considerable sum of money from her grandfather, and then she was free from her mother and her whims (Baker 21).

As had been clear to her from a young age, Hall was a lesbian, and described herself as a congenital invert. When she was 27 years old, in 1907, she met Mabel Batten in Germany. Mabel was 51 years old, married, had a grown-up daughter, and a granddaughter. She and Hall started a relationship. Mabel's nickname was 'Ladye', because she was used to flattery. She was the one who gave Hall the name 'John', a name she would use privately for the rest of her life. Ladye introduced her to the Roman Catholic faith, taking her to services (Baker 43). Hall had been searching for a way to shape her life, and she converted to Roman Catholicism.

In 1915, Hall fell in love with Ladye's cousin, Una Troubridge (1887-1963), who was also a married woman, and mother to a young girl. They had an affair, while Hall still had a relationship with Ladye, as well. In 1916, Ladye died and Una had separated from her husband. About a year later, Una and Hall started living together. The couple had a close circle of friends who were all united in their homosexuality, and they were able to socialise in a way inconceivable before (Baker 134).

In 1924, Hall published her first novel, *The Unlit Lamp*, about a young woman who wanted to live with her friend in London, but is trapped at home by her mother's emotional dependence on her. This is Hall's first novel with a lesbian woman at the centre of it, though it was not recognised as such then. Two women living together, also called a 'Boston marriage', simply meant they were independent and were not supported by a man (Newton 561). That these two women were, or could be, lovers, did not occur to any one's – man's – mind.

Hall first broached the idea with Una to write about congenital inversion in 1926. Una writes about it in her diary:

John came to me one day with unusual gravity and asked for my decision in a serious matter: she had long wanted to write a book on sexual inversion, a novel that would be accessible to the general public who did not have access to technical treatises. [...]

It was her absolute conviction that such a book could only be written by a sexual invert, who alone could be qualified by personal knowledge and experience to speak on behalf of a misunderstood and misjudged minority. (Baker 189)

She immediately gave her blessing, as the plight of the homosexual woman was not something that came lightly to Hall, and Una, for that matter.

A few publishers declined the publishing rights of the novel, citing its propagandist tone for their refusal. However, Herbert Jonathan Cape, founder of Jonathan Cape publishing house, who was seen as a modern publisher, decided to take the novel on. Nevertheless, he was hesitant because of its contents, and first only wanted a limited edition of 1,250 copies, priced as 25 cents each (which was three times more than a normal novel (Baker 204). It would keep the book out of the hands of sensation seekers. In June 1928, *The Well of Loneliness* was published. The novel is a popularisation of Hall's own experience, and the study of sexology, especially those of Krafft-Ebing (Bauer 112). It gained particular power because Hall wrote as a lesbian herself, using scientific discourse in her depiction of a sexual invert, illustrating the plight of the lesbian woman.

2.2 – Stephen Gordon in *The Well of Loneliness*

The Well of Loneliness is set in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, starting with the birth of Stephen Gordon, the protagonist of the novel. Her parents, Sir Philip and Lady Anna, live at Morton Hall, a country estate in Worcestershire. Stephen is called so because her parents had expected a son, and had chosen the name before she was born (Hall 4). Stephen is born a “narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby” (Hall 5), which is the first reinforcement we see of Stephen being described as a male. Sir

Philip decides to bring up Stephen as if she were a boy, teaching her fencing, hunting, riding astride, and exercising. From a young age, we thus see Stephen in a scenario that is not typical for a young girl. She does not like to wear dresses, nor does she ride side-saddle like a girl. Hall describes Stephen like this: “she throve, seeming strong, and when her hair grew it was seen to be auburn like Sir Philip’s. There was also a tiny cleft in her chin, [...] Anna saw that her eyes were going to be hazel – and thought that their expression was her father’s” (Hall 6). With her father’s eyes and dark hair, Stephen is quite masculine in how she looks as well. In her article “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman”, Esther Newton coined the identification of a ‘Mythic Mannish Lesbian’, which is “a figure who is defined a lesbian *because* her behaviour or dress (and usually both) manifest elements designated as exclusively masculine” (560). This portrayal is repeated throughout the novel for Stephen, and is drawn from ideas from sexologists such as Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Karl Ulrich, sources Hall evidently used in *The Well of Loneliness*.

When Stephen is seven years old, she becomes infatuated with one of the housemaids, Collins. She follows her around, and even tries to get a ‘housemaid’s knee’, like Collins has, to share in her suffering (Hall 17). Stephen tries to take away Collins’ injury by praying that she would take it over at first, and when that did not work, she decided to get one of her own. This is the first instance in which Stephen portrays herself as a martyr in a relationship to another woman, which she will repeat twice (Whitlock 577). Collins is quite flattered by Stephen’s actions, and later tells Mrs Bingham, Stephen’s nurse: “if that’s not real loving then I don’t know nothing” (Hall 23). One day, Stephen spies Collins and the footman, Henry, in a shed, where he “kissed her full on the lips” (Hall 23). In an impulse, she has gotten a flower pot and hurled it at the footman’s head, hitting him in the face. Stephen flees the scene, to her father, who listens to the whole story and then tells her: “I’m going to treat you like a boy, and a boy must always be brave, remember” (Hall 23). Her father telling

Stephen to be brave like a boy is yet another reinforcement of her feelings of being a boy in a girl's body. According to Heike Bauer, Hall may have chosen a maid as Stephen's love interest because it echoes Krafft-Ebing's idea that lesbianism is "fashionable" (qtd. in Bauer 130); for if Stephen had been male, it would not have been unusual for him to have his first sexual experience with a maidservant (130).

Stephen's relationship with her parents is ambivalent. Her mother perceives homosexuality as unnatural and rejects her daughter when it becomes clear 'what' she is. Her father, on the other hand, tries to understand inversion by reading what he can about the subject (Whitlock 563). As she grows up, she starts looking more and more like her father, and grows very close to him. She discerns Sir Philip's disappointment that she is not a boy, and she herself notices it, too. However, her mother and she are not close at all. Stephen likes going out with her, despite having to dress up like a girl, because she can nevertheless act like a boy, for example when she helps her mother across a road, protecting her from traffic and puddles. However, Lady Anna cannot overcome her distaste for her masculine daughter. As Stephen grows into her late teens, her mother becomes openly critical of her. Stephen is now completely aware of her situation as well, that she is not like other, 'normal', girls. She prefers the company of men, but both men and women do not take to her, she is often deemed too unfeminine and too clever (Baker 210).

One man she does form a friendship with is Martin Hallam, with whom she shares her love of nature. "We're like brothers," Stephen says (Hall 102). However, Martin proposes marriage to her one day, and she is horrified. Once again, she tells her father about the situation, and asks:

'Is there anything strange about me, Father, that I should have felt as I did about Martin?' And then she would try to explain very calmly what it was she had felt, the intensity of it. She would try to make him understand her suspicion that this feeling of

hers was a thing fundamental, much more than merely not being in love; much, much more than not wanting to marry Martin. (Hall 109)

Sir Philip responds “there’s nothing strange about you, some day you may meet a man you can love. And supposing you don’t, well, what of it, Stephen? Marriage isn’t the only career for a woman” (Hall 115). We know that Sir Philip has read up on sexology, reading Havelock Ellis and Karl Heinrich Ulrich, yet he decides against telling Stephen about it. He wants her, still, to feel relatively normal, to just be who she is, without the label of ‘invert’ being placated upon her.

Stephen feels more and more isolated, rejected by both men and women, as well as her own mother. Her father is the only person who she can still talk to, who accepts her the way she is, and her sense of isolation is complete when Sir Philip is killed by a falling tree. On his deathbed, he tries to tell Lady Anna and Stephen about what she is, but comes no further than “It’s – Stephen – our child – she’s, she’s – it’s Stephen – not like –” (Hall 128). With Sir Philip dead, Stephen loses her sole source of love and understanding.

Stephen meets her second love, Angela Crosby, when her dog is attacked and saved by Stephen. She is about twenty-one years old now and dresses in jackets and ties exclusively. Angela just started living in the Grange, another estate in Upton. Angela Crosby is married to a retired businessman, but starts a secret affair with Stephen. Angela encourages Stephen in her advances, yet never intends to commit to the relationship. Stephen tells her often how much she loves her: “I know that I love you, and that nothing else matters in the world” (Hall 162), “she kissed her full on the lips, as a lover” (162), and tries to persuade Angela to “tell him the truth and so will you, Angela; and after we’ve told him we’ll go away, and we’ll live quite openly together, you and I, which is what we owe to ourselves and our love” (166). However, Stephen is disenchanted when Angela points out that they cannot

marry each other. Stephen is trying to get to know herself, to understand ‘what’ she is, but can only think of herself as “queer” and “freakish” (Skinner 22).

Angela and Stephen spend some time apart, not seeing each other, but eventually Stephen cannot help it and decides to buy her a birthday present in the form of a very expensive ring, and once again they are united: Stephen holds her safe in her arms while she rests (Hall 204). In this scene, Stephen is characterised in a masculine role, again. She buys expensive jewellery for Angela, and she holds Angela, to give her a sense of protection. The statement that Violet gave her earlier: “no woman can really stand alone, she always needs a man to protect her” (Hall 194), is echoed in this scene. Perhaps, Stephen wants to prove to herself that she does not need a man, and that she can be just a protective as one. At the same time, Angela also starts an affair with Roger Antrim, another neighbour. Angela uses Stephen to torture her husband, permitting her to show signs of affection that were not allowed with him present in the past. As soon as he leaves the room, the affections would become passionless, almost painful (Hall 213). Stephen writes her a letter which expresses “all the pent-up passion of months, all the terrible, rending, destructive frustrations [that] must burst forth from her heart” (Hall 222) to Angela. Unfortunately, Angela is afraid that Stephen might tell her husband about their affair, and decides to show him the letter Stephen wrote her, portraying her as a pervert and a degenerate (Hall 223). Ralph decides to “hound her out of the county before I’ve done – and with luck out of England” (Hall 223).

A few days later Lady Anna receives a letter from Ralph Crosby, telling her that Stephen is no longer welcome at the Grange. He encloses a copy of Stephen’s letter to Angela as well. Lady Anna is disgusted with Stephen, and tells her:

I’ve often felt that I was being unjust, unnatural – but now I know that my instinct was right [...] it is you who are unnatural, not I. And this thing that you are is a sin against creation. Above all is this thing a sin against the father who bred you, the

father whom you dare to resemble. You dare to look like your father, and your face is a living insult to his memory. [...] In that letter you say things that may only be said between man and woman, and coming from you they are vile and filthy words of corruption. (Hall 226-7)

Stephen tries to defend herself by saying that her love for Angela is just as real and pure as her mother's love for her father, but Lady Anna does not want to hear it and makes it clear that they cannot keep on living at Morton Hall together. Morton was Stephen's place where she found self-identity, but because it represents respectable society, Lady Anna cannot let her stay there (Skinner 28). Stephen leaves with Puddle, but not before she goes into her father's study one last time.

There, she finds a number of books, one by Krafft-Ebing, on congenital inversion. They have notes written in the margins by her father, about her. She exclaims:

You knew! All the time you knew this thing, but because of your pity you wouldn't tell me. Oh, Father – and there are so many of us – thousands of miserable, unwanted people, who have no right to love, no right to compassion because they're maimed, hideously maimed and ugly. (Hall 231)

Sir Philip knew all this time 'what' Stephen was, yet was too afraid to tell her the truth.

Stephen then opens her father's Bible on this passage: "And the Lord set a mark upon Cain..." (GEN 4:15), which, to Stephen, means that that inversion is like the mark of Cain, as they are both exiled from society. Both her mother's rejection and her father's fear of telling the truth pain her greatly, because she "realises that her father denied her the right to take comfort and pleasure in the fact that there are 'thousands' of inverts; that there exists a community of inverts" (Bauer 124).

Stephen and Puddle settle in London, where she becomes a writer. Her first novel, *The Furrow*, is a great success. However, Stephen felt it was missing something. "It was fine,

but it wasn't complete because I'm not complete and I never shall be" (Hall 243). Stephen feels that she cannot be considered a great writer, because she cannot have a relationship with a man. She cannot stand that there is love everywhere, yet it is not within reach for her. Stephen has changed during her exile; she has started smoking, and has (finally) cut her hair short, like a man's (Hall 236). She decides to go abroad for a while, and not to have any communication with her mother. Her visits to Morton are too painful, for two reasons: Stephen still sees Morton as her home, her safe haven, and condemns her mother both for exiling her from it, and because of her rejection of her own daughter.

Stephen renews her friendship with old family friend Jonathan Brockett, a playwright and homosexual. She cannot decide whether she is attracted to him or repelled by him, as he can at times be brilliant and foolish. He advises her to go to Paris, a city he often goes to as well, because of France's liberal homosexuality laws. There, Brockett introduces her to Valérie Seymour, an American writer living in Paris. Brockett does his best to acquaint Valérie and Stephen, "to let me see that he knows what I am, and he wants to let Valérie Seymour know too" (Hall 276), Stephen thinks. Valérie takes a liking to Stephen, and recommends a house to her in the Rue Jacob, which Stephen eventually buys. The Rue Jacob became famous in the 1920s, as it was the location of Natalie Barney's salon, a mecca for homosexual artists in Paris. Hall frequented it when she visited Paris, and was a good friend of Barney, and Valérie Seymour is based upon her (Whitlock 574). Hall also makes Stephen's home in the Rue Jacob a space for lesbian identity and tradition, as opposed to Stephen's home in England, which stands for heterosexuality and order (Skinner 27).

The First World War breaks out, and Stephen is pleased to learn that all the men working at Morton have enlisted. Jonathan Brockett also tells her he has enlisted for the war, in a note saying "I've just been and gone and done it! Please send me tuckboxes when I'm sitting in a trench;" (Hall 301). Stephen is very jealous of him, as he, as a homosexual man,

has not been refused when he enlisted. Brockett, a homosexual “with the soft white hands, and the foolish gestures, and the high little laugh” (Hall 302), is still more useful to the country than Stephen, a woman desperate to be a man. It crushes her, and she becomes obsessed with the idea to get to the front as well, yet always gets the same reply: “England did not send women to the front-line trenches” (Hall 306).

Stephen finds a way to be of use during the war, by joining a women’s ambulance unit in France. It is during this time she meets her second great love, Mary Llewellyn. Mary is a young and innocent eighteen-year-old girl from Wales and Stephen falls in love with her because of a desire to take care of her and look after her. However, Stephen dismisses her own feelings, telling herself she is not worthy of affection and friendship (Hall 324). When the war ends, they take a holiday together. Stephen has been able to repress her love for Mary up to this point, but Mary threatens to leave when Stephen keeps feigning disinterest. Stephen declares her love to Mary and then follows the most controversial sentence in the book: “and that night they were not divided” (Hall 353). This shows us how implicitly the lesbian relationship between Stephen and Mary is described. Hall never intended her novel to be a sensational story of two women in love, so Hall resisted descriptions of such a nature.

Mary moves in with Stephen in Paris and Stephen resumes her writing, while Mary assumes the role of wife. However, problems arise that threaten their relationship. Mary is not invited by Lady Anna when she invites Stephen over to Morton (Hall 376); and Lady Massey, a seeming good friend, cancels their plans for Christmas when she finds out the true nature of Mary and Stephen’s ‘friendship’ (Hall 418). Prompted by Jonathan Brockett, Stephen decides to introduce Mary to Valérie Seymour. They start going to her parties and make friends with other homosexuals. However, none of these friends lead a successful or happy life. Wanda is an alcoholic, Jamie has psychological issues, and Margaret goes from lover to lover. Mary and Stephen’s lesbian friends show that Hall believed that lesbians were

essentially doomed. Hall based her view of lesbian sexuality on a conventional gender dynamic, which meant that people such as Mary and Barbara were not true inverts, but only the invert's love interest. They do not display the masculine characteristics of the true invert, but are attracted to women who do. This theory tells us that Mary must, deep down, desire a man, so her relationship with Stephen is from the beginning unstable and doomed, as Mary must at some point returned to her 'natural' state of heterosexuality.

At this point in the narrative, Martin Hallam comes back into the picture. Stephen renews her friendship with him, as he has "thought a great deal about the subject [of inversion]. He spoke very little of his studies, however, just accepting her now for the thing that she was, without question" (Hall 472). Stephen once again calls herself 'a thing', she still feels that she, as an invert, is not worthy of humanity. Stephen realises that Martin Hallam has fallen in love with Mary, and that if she really loves Mary, she must let her marry Martin. He can give her everything she cannot, such as children, protection, and respectful friends (Hall 482). When Stephen is, once again, alone, she is overcome with pain. She imagines an army of inverts invading her house and in a final fit of agony, she calls "Acknowledge us, oh God, before the whole world. Give us also the right to our existence!" This final exclamation is a reinforcement of the fact that *The Well of Loneliness* is not apologetic, but a novel that publicises the existence of inversion and claims that society's denial will have to stop (Bauer 133).

Radclyffe Hall portrays Stephen's gender identity as something directly related to her sexual identity, a notion she had picked up from the sexologist's view on sexuality and sexual inversion. Inversion is a way of describing lesbianism in a heterosexual context: inverts are women who have a man's soul, and try to imitate a heterosexual relationship with another woman by dressing as a man. This implies that heterosexuality is the only valid sexuality (Skinner 20). Because Stephen is a lesbian, she has to be masculine. Hall decided to present

the narrative of *The Well of Loneliness* as a sexual case study, as well as her personal experiences as a lesbian and congenital invert: “being myself a congenital invert, I understood the subject from the inside as well as from medical and psychological text-books” (qtd. in Bauer 119). This provided a source of dramatic effect, but she was also able to challenge preconceived ideas about the “inherent misery of the female invert” (Bauer 127).

The Well of Loneliness and *Orlando* have much in common, as both novels are portraits of an artist, and both protagonists have an ambiguous relation to literary convention, as Stephen is a lesbian, and Orlando is bisexual, and not within the realm of conventional gender identity (Whitlock 561). While *The Well of Loneliness* became the object of a court case, *Orlando* was escaping legal scrutiny. In the following chapter, I will examine Virginia Woolf’s representation of androgyny, lesbianism, and gender identity in *Orlando*.

Chapter 3 – Woolf’s View of Gender Identity as Explained in *Orlando*

In *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf describes the life of a young man who changes gender as he travels through time, meeting key figures in English history, such as Alexander Pope and Queen Elizabeth I. The reader meets Orlando first in the sixteenth century, and leaves her in the twentieth century, so her story spans over 400 years, in which Orlando ages only about 30 years. Woolf did not let herself be constrained by time or gender in her writing, she was much more interested in Orlando’s psyche, internal thoughts and feelings than the tradition of ‘truth in description’ that was maintained by traditional Victorian biographers. *Orlando* is a fantastical biography based on Vita Sackville-West, who was Woolf’s lover for a while (Bell 132). Though critics often read the novel as such, the aspect of gender identity is also an intriguing and significant aspect of the novel; Woolf created a “revolutionary view of gender, identity, and the body” (Cervetti 165) that does not often appear in discussions about the novel.

3.1 – The Life of Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941, née Stephen) was born in Kensington, London, as the second to youngest child of a family with eight children. Her father was Sir Leslie Stephen, noted historian, and founder of the Dictionary of National Biography in 1882. Woolf’s mother, Julia Jackson, was born in India and came to England with her mother, where she became a model for Pre-Raphaelite painters. They married in 1878 and had four children together: Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia, and Adrian.

After her father died, Virginia, Vanessa, and Adrian bought a house in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury. Through her brothers’ contacts at Cambridge, she came to know well-known literati such as Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Rupert Brooke, Leonard Woolf, and John Maynard Keynes. Together, they formed the Bloomsbury Group, a circle of intellectuals, all

concerned with the importance of the arts. Vanessa got married to Clive Bell, and Virginia and Adrian lived together for a while at Gordon Square.

Virginia began writing professionally in 1900, first as a journalist for the Times Literary Supplement, later she wrote novels and essays as a public intellectual. Most of her works were self-published by the Hogarth Press, which she had founded with husband Leonard Woolf in 1917. She experimented with the stream of consciousness-technique and the description of the psyche and internal world of her characters. She would deliberately write an uneventful narrative, to be able to focus completely on her character's consciousness. *Orlando* was an experiment in biography, as well as a mockery of the techniques of historical biographers who focused solely on fact. *Orlando* was her sixth major novel, published in 1928, around the time of the trials against *The Well of Loneliness*. *Orlando* was not censored, or even put on trial, perhaps because Woolf had used narrative strategies that expose a conventional heterosexuality, while showing a possibility for same-sex love and desire, if one reads between the lines (Hankins 180). Adam Parkes argues in "Lesbianism, History, and Censorship: *The Well of Loneliness* and the Suppressed Randiness of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*", that at the same time, Woolf mocks all sex and gender codes in *Orlando*, "destabilizing the very grounds on which sexological as well as legal conventions were founded" (436). Orlando changes sex midway through the story, lives through four centuries, loves women when he is a man, and men when she has become a woman. Despite the veiled 'lesbian' nature of the novel, it was one of Woolf's most successful novels. It was very accessible as a satirical history of England. She caricatures the way traditional Victorian biographies emphasised facts, whereas she emphasised the emotions and thoughts of her main character. This aligned with her view that solely presenting facts about someone's life failed to capture the essence of the subject discussed.

In *A Room of One's Own* (1928) Woolf expresses her idea of an androgynous mind, a mind that was comprised of aspects of both genders. She wonders “whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness” (Woolf 2143). When these different parts work together, the mind is most efficient. Woolf argues that many of the great writers such as Shakespeare, Keats, and Shelley had androgynous minds (Woolf 2146). The androgynous mind is a very important aspect of *Orlando*, for it demonstrates that a person does not have to be completely male or female, but rather a combination of the two. The plot of *Orlando* is built on various instances of differences in male and female gender identity, such as identity and social conduct, identity and dress, and identity and the writing profession. Woolf portrays Orlando in various instances where these key points are shown from both a masculine and feminine perspective.

3.2 – Gender Identity in *Orlando*

At the start of the novel, Orlando is a young nobleman longing to go on adventures around the world. Though the first sentence of the novel is “He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it” (Woolf 5), Woolf later describes Orlando in an androgynous way, depicting him with “peach” cheeks, and exquisite white teeth, “dark hair”, and “eyes like drenched violets” (Woolf 6). Nancy Cervetti argues in “In the Breeches, Petticoats, and Pleasure of ‘Orlando’”, that because Woolf immediately calls the reader’s attention to gender, she creates doubt in the reader; even though Orlando is a man, he could also pass for a woman because of his clothes (166). Orlando lives at the court of Queen Elizabeth I, where he courts a number of girls, until he meets the exotic Sasha, a Russian princess. He immediately becomes very attracted to her, despite not being able to tell whether she is a man or woman when they first meet. They are ice-skating, and Orlando thinks that because he is very fast and agile, he must be a boy: “Orlando was ready to tear his

hair with vexation that the person was of his own sex, and thus all embraces were out of the question” (Woolf 17). Woolf reinforces that because Orlando and the person he desires is also (thought to be) a man, he cannot act upon his desires. When it becomes clear that the figure is indeed a woman, Orlando finally allows himself to “stare, tremble, turn hot, turn cold” (Woolf 17). Orlando and Sasha grow very close, and they make plans to run away together. Unfortunately, Orlando waits for Sasha in the night, but she never comes. He finds out that she has run away with a Russian seaman instead. Both Sasha and Orlando are described in ways that cross gender boundaries. Sasha is thought to be a man at first because of her agility on the ice and the way she is dressed, and Orlando’s appearance is described in similar ways as one would describe a woman.

After Sasha has left him, Orlando retreats to his enormous house – it has 365 rooms – where he decides to solely focus on writing. One afternoon, he sees a figure in his garden, a very tall woman named the Archduchess Harriet of Romania, who flirts with him and wants to marry him. Orlando is repulsed by her and has to flee England to get away from her. The King sends him to Constantinople, Turkey, as an ambassador, where he is soon named a duke. One night, a woman is seen climbing up a rope hanging from Orlando’s balcony. The next morning, Orlando cannot be awakened. While Orlando is in a coma-like state, an uprising occurs, and many foreigners are killed. A week later, Orlando awakens, but now, he is a woman:

He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess – he was a woman [...] No human being, since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing. His form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman’s grace [...] Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath. (Woolf 67)

It does not concern her at all that she is a woman, as inside, she still feels the same. The sex change leaves Orlando's identity unchanged, she hardly notices it herself. This shows us that to Orlando, and to Woolf, gender is not as important as other qualities that compose a person. This becomes apparent in the passages that follow.

Orlando joins the tribe of a gypsy, where she revels in her love of nature. This is in complete contrast to the gypsy's view on nature as dangerous and potentially harmful (Woolf 70). Orlando and the gypsies do not get along very well, and Orlando decides to go back to England. It is on this journey to England that Orlando first has to give her sex a thought, as she has to dress like a lady to be able to sail to England (Cervetti 166). She immediately experiences someone treating her differently because she is a woman. Orlando dresses as a woman of rank (Woolf 75), and mentions her skirts being "plaguey things to have about one's heels. [...] Could I, however, leap overboard and swim in clothes like these? No!" (Woolf 75). She accidentally shows about two inches of her calf, which startled a sailor on the mast so that "he missed his footing and only saved himself by the skin of his teeth" (Woolf 77). This concerns Orlando greatly, as once her legs were "the finest legs that a nobleman has ever stood upright upon" (Woolf 10), and now she cannot show them "lest a sailor may fall from a mast-head" (Woolf 77). Woolf demonstrates in this passage the first key point, the differences between acceptable social conduct for men and women. As a man, Orlando would have been able to such things as hit a man, tell a lie, or lead an army (Woolf 77), but now that Orlando is a woman, she cannot do any of these things. It is something she feels bitter about.

The Captain invites Orlando to dinner, where she realises that it pleases men if a woman first refuses him, to see him frown, and then to yield and see him smile (Woolf 76). She considers that to please men, "must I then begin to respect the opinion of the other sex, how monstrous I think it is?" (Woolf 76). She is also appalled by the energy it takes her to

make herself presentable and “obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled” (Woolf 76) every day. When Orlando was a man he had demanded that of the women in his life, as well. Now, she realises that these things do not come naturally to women: “They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life, by the most tedious discipline” (Woolf 77). Orlando concludes her thoughts by censoring both sexes equally, “as if she belonged to neither” (Woolf 77), sharing the weaknesses and strengths of each. As mentioned in *A Room of One’s Own*, Orlando’s psyche is androgynous and thus highly efficient (2143). Orlando’s androgynous mind causes her to be insightful of both sexes, and draw conclusions accordingly: Orlando as a man had become a fool when he was with a woman. As a woman, however, she has a very limited role in society, “armoured with every weapon as they [men] are, while they debar us [women] even from a knowledge of the alphabet” (Woolf 78).

Back in England, Orlando learns that there are three criminal charges against her: that she is dead, that she is a woman – “which amounts to much the same thing” (Woolf 82), as both cannot hold property – and that she is married to a dancer by which she has three sons, who claimed that their father was deceased and all his property now belonged to them. Orlando pays little attention to these facts, and eventually they are solved. She meets the Archduchess Harriet again, but we learn that she was actually a man, dressed in woman’s clothing and pretending to be a woman to get closer to Orlando, with whom he was in love. Now that Orlando is a woman, the Archduke Harry wants to marry her. Orlando does not give him an answer, and the Duke returns every day, waiting for an answer. They have nothing to talk about, and devise a game where they bet money on where a fly will land. Orlando cheats at the game, and when she is found out by the Duke, he leaves her. Orlando is relieved she does not have to marry him. The Archduke’s ‘sex change’ is a parody of Orlando’s sex change as it is not a real one, but rather a comical sex change, especially if the

reader remembers that the Duke is over six feet tall. Woolf demonstrates that people's identity is for a large part based on clothing. The Archduke tries to change his gender, because he fell in love with Orlando when she was still a man. Now that Orlando is a woman, he can let go of the disguise.

Orlando also changes her clothing to change her gender appearance. However, because she knows both sexes, and their gender codes, she can change her sex "far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing" (Woolf 108), and legitimately, unlike the Duke. She "never feels or suggests 'a woman trapped in a man's body' or 'a man trapped in the body of a woman.'" Orlando codes his dress according to practicality or sexual desire. Clipping the trees, he wears breeches, and desiring the love of a woman, he wears the suit of a nobleman" (Cervetti 166-67). Changing her appearance so often, the narrator wonders whether "it is clothes that wear us and not we them" (Woolf 92), suggesting that clothes have an effect on how we behave in society (Parkes 451). One night, she goes out in her men's clothes and sees a beautiful girl sitting on a bench. She is a prostitute, who takes Orlando to her rooms. Orlando takes pity on the girl and reveals herself a woman (Woolf 106). From then on, Orlando often changes dress, sometimes even multiple times a day, from a man's to a woman's. She finds that living like both genders is freeing for her, as she can go out at night looking for adventure dressed as a man (Woolf 109). Orlando now uses clothing to express her gender identity. Even though sexually she is a woman, this does not mean that she has to act like a woman constantly. She can don men's clothes and 'be' a man, if she wants to. The second key point Woolf makes in *Orlando*, links dress and identity. There is a difference between the Archduke's cross-dressing and Orlando's cross-dressing. The Archduke does it only to win Orlando's love, whereas Orlando does it for herself. She wants to be free, and that can only be achieved when she dresses in masculine clothes once in a while, because not only her behaviour, but only how others receive her changes depending on

what clothes she wears. For example, Nell the prostitute is submissive to Orlando when she believes that Orlando is a man, but as soon as Orlando's real sex is revealed, her identity changes and Nell stops trying to impress her (Boshier 89). Woolf reinforces her belief that gender is an act people put on, both for themselves and society around them: "the body as clothing for the soul; actual clothing as a disguise, as a symbol of one's true sex, or as a prop to one's role" (Fassler 243).

The narrative now enters the nineteenth century, the Victorian Era, and Orlando feels pressured to yield to the "spirit of the age" (Woolf 116), and marry and have children. Orlando is unable to write poetry as long as she is unmarried. This is the final key point that Woolf raises in *Orlando*. Because her mind is too preoccupied with wanting a husband and children, she cannot write. Even though, at first, her personality was unchanged by her change of sex, her character leans more towards feminine now: "the socio-cultural climate [has] shape[d] her body, dress, and personality as well. In wearing the Victorian costume, in marrying, Orlando performs a deep obeisance to the spirit of the age" (Cervetti 170). Orlando does not know who she can marry, as all of her friends are long gone and even the Archduke Harry is married to someone else now. One day, she wanders out into the moors, thinking herself nature's bride. She falls down and thinks she is dying there and then. A man rides up to her, and rescues her (Woolf 123). They start talking, and in a very short time, they are engaged. They know everything about each other, even before they know one another's name. Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine is a seaman, a rugged, strong man, who has the sensitivities of a woman. They have this realisation about one another: Orlando exclaims "You're a woman, Shel!" and Shelmerdine tells Orlando "You're a man, Orlando!" (Woolf 124). To Orlando, he combines the best of both genders, him being "strange and subtle as a woman", while Shelmerdine thinks Orlando "as tolerant and free-spoken as a man" (Woolf 127). This chapter is especially meaningful in light of the morale of the Bloomsbury Group,

who mostly opposed Victorian morality. They were put off by their – in their eyes – unnecessary conventions and restraint. They disliked being dictated how to act, especially as women, who were very limited in their activity, and wanted to have the freedom to develop their own lifestyles (Archive Journeys). All of her petticoats and dresses limit Orlando's physical mobility, as well as the fact that Orlando is not allowed to go out in public alone, as a woman. This dependence on men is rejected by Orlando, and by Woolf. Orlando does find a husband, and love, in Shelmerdine, with whom she defies society's gender roles.

Because Shelmerdine must go back to sea, they get married quickly, like lovers do in the Victorian romance novels. Orlando is alone again, but now married, having found the "life and a love" she always dreamt of. Soon after the wedding, she has a baby boy. It is a remarkably uneventful happening, there is only one sentence dedicated to the event: "'It's a very fine boy, M'Lady,' said Mrs Banting, the midwife, putting her first-born child into Orlando's arms" (Woolf 146). Woolf makes events such as marriage and childbirth relatively mundane and unremarkable, because by "submitting Orlando to the marriage and childbirth to which this relationship leads, Woolf mocks heterosexual romance" (Parkes 450). Orlando thinks about all the lives she lived, reflecting on who actually is the real Orlando. She suddenly realises that she is all of them. All of the different experiences she had, being at the court of Elizabeth, an ambassador in Constantinople, becoming a woman, living in a gypsy camp, and finding a husband are all brought together in Orlando's current personality. *Orlando* seems a novel that is just a "joke" (Bell 42), but it is much more than that. In its discussion of sexuality in different circumstances, such as clothing and social etiquette, *Orlando* touches upon issues of gender identity, gender roles, self-knowledge, and the subjectivity of truth. Because Orlando changes sex to female halfway through the novel, she is able to reflect on different positions and experiences of gender. She realises that being a woman is not always easy, as the long skirts are a bother when moving around, and men will

have impure thoughts about her if she shows too much skin. Men will also not value her opinion as much as when she was a man. However, Orlando learns to enjoy being both a man and a woman, dressing up in men's clothing to be able to explore the city without limitations. Throughout the novel, Woolf argues for an androgynous mind as she did in *A Room of One's Own*. Orlando, who possesses characteristics of both a man and a woman, serves to show the reader that a sexless mind is superior to a mind that only possesses the knowledge and characteristics of just one gender.

Especially the scenes immediately after Orlando's sex change, when it appears that only her gender appearance has changed, and the later scenes that take place in the nineteenth century, are very significant in conveying Woolf's views on gender and sexuality. Right after Orlando wakes up a woman, she is biologically a woman now, but mentally, she is still a man. Over the course of centuries, this changes slightly, as Orlando starts desiring a husband and children, even though this might be partly because of the societal pressure on women in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Orlando still desires to go outside freely, to don men's clothes, and feels freer in them than in women's clothing, because petticoats and long skirts limit her movements and showing skin will make men have impure thoughts about her. Dress is a persistent theme in *Orlando*, as different clothes signify different desires. *Orlando* demonstrates gender transformation, and the idea of gender differences throughout the novel. Orlando is dismayed that she cannot do the things she could do when she was a man; over time, her character changes to a more feminine mind, though she still enjoys dressing as a man to experience more social freedom. This becomes clear especially right after the sex change, as Orlando wakes up, sees herself and her changed form in the mirror, and goes about her day. Her complete lack of disconcertion for the fact that she is now a woman is exemplary of how Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group saw gender roles, as Woolf saw gender as a "cultural performance" (Cervetti 168), something that was not biological, but a societal

concept, imposed on people to make them behave in a certain way. Though there appear to be two opposite poles of gender in the world of *Orlando*, there is nothing to fix them in place, allowing people to roam freely between them (Parkes 452). Orlando challenged gender identity through different means, which were gender and sexuality in relation to social conduct, dress, and work, showing the reader that someone who was born a male, does not have to profess a completely male identity his whole life.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have discussed the way in which Virginia Woolf and Radclyffe Hall expressed their ideas on gender identity and the relation to sexual identity, by use of their novels *Orlando* and *The Well of Loneliness* respectively. Even though Virginia Woolf did not make the 'lesbian' content explicit in *Orlando*, her novel is often linked to *The Well of Loneliness*, which did have an ambiguously explicit lesbian content. Hall's novel became notorious and was banned from distribution a few months after its publication, whereas Woolf's novel escaped legal scrutiny. The novels have a number of things in common: firstly, both *Orlando* and *The Well of Loneliness* are portraits of artists who have an ambiguous relationship with literary convention because of their sexual deviance (Whitlock 561); second, both *Orlando* and *The Well of Loneliness* can be seen as a reworking of traditional literary conventions in the light of an ambiguous gender and sexuality. Thirdly, both novels were a risk for the author, who challenged their reputation in publishing their books; fourth, both of the works used clothing as a main instrument to express the gender of the protagonist; and finally, both were written with the goal to defy the Victorian constraints laid upon sexuality, especially in women. However, there is one main difference: Stephen Gordon defines herself as a freak, abnormal, and unnatural, but Orlando embraces her ability to dress in a masculine way, changing between man and woman as it pleases her.

As I examined in the third chapter, Woolf establishes a fluid gender identity in *Orlando*, one that can change between masculine and feminine. She argues for an androgynous mind, composed of aspects of both male and female characteristics, to make the brain most efficient. Woolf shows the reader three main elements of gender differences: in social convention, in clothing, and in profession. Orlando experiences that she cannot act the same way as a woman than as a man; and she discovers that if she dresses as a man, she can enjoy more freedom; however, as a woman, she finds herself unable to write poetry while she

is unmarried and childless. Orlando and her husband Shelmerdine also do not have a conventional heterosexual marriage: Shelmerdine portrays some feminine qualities, such as being “strange and subtle as a woman” (Woolf 127), which complements Orlando, who is “tolerance and free-spoken as a man” (Woolf 127). Because both Shelmerdine and Orlando combine positive qualities of both genders, they are perfect for one another.

Radclyffe Hall tells a very different story in *The Well of Loneliness*. As discussed in chapter two, she herself was a lesbian who preferred to dress in masculine clothing, and she characterised Stephen Gordon the same way. Stephen is a ‘mannish lesbian’, a masculine soul in a female body. Even though Hall sometimes portrays Stephen’s life as happy – for example the first few months she is in a relationship with Angela Crosby, or her relationship with Mary – Stephen’s relationships are all doomed to fail, and she eventually ends up alone, while her lover Mary marries a man. From a young age, Stephen was disliked by her mother, while her father tried everything in his power to let her live her life as a boy. He taught her to ride, to fence, and to lift weights, but refrained from involving her in his studies about inversion, because it was not socially acceptable to express these concerns.

Homosexuals who (were) characterised as the opposite sex were named ‘congenital invert’, which meant that biological males were actually women, and identified as women, and that biological females identified as men. This phenomenon was researched by a number of scientists in the early twentieth century, the most important of which were Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who argued that homosexuality was a perversion of the mind, induced by masturbation; and Havelock Ellis, who was the first scientist who did not condemn homosexuality as a disease or as immoral. Sigmund Freud, the most well-known researcher of sexuality, whose five stages of sexual development revolutionised ideas on how a sexual identity was developed, was also an important scientist in this field of research. This was discussed in chapter one, where a historical background was set out to discuss the

development of psychoanalysis and sexology in the early twentieth century. In their studies, both Ellis and Krafft-Ebing did not pay much attention to female homosexuals, but they did identify lesbians by their masculine behaviour, such as smoking, talking with a low voice, and desiring male privilege and power (Smith-Rosenberg 272). Despite his ideas on lesbians, Ellis was one of the first researchers who saw homosexuality and transgenderism as distinct from one another. Some other theorists did admit that male homosexuals might not have outwardly feminine characteristics, and vice versa, but “most believed it likely” (Fassler 242).

The discussion of the two novels shows us that there are a number of different ways in which someone can view gender identity and its relation to sexuality. Hall showed us her belief that sexuality and gender identity is linked, and that it will aspire heterosexual norms. This meant that if a woman loves other women, that woman must have the soul of a man. Woolf showed us another viewpoint, which is that people do not have to be just one gender. A man can have feminine characteristics and vice versa, as it will only enrich that person’s life. To Woolf, heterosexuality is not the norm.

In conclusion, the early twentieth century had seen a great surge forward in the scientific fields of psychoanalysis and psychology, with scientists researching the differences between sex, gender, and sexuality. As explained in the first chapter, these aspects of life had become important for the modernist movement, who “rejected the nineteenth-century conception of female sexuality. Where the Victorians had all but denied women a sexual existence, the modernists argued her sexual parity with the male” (Robinson 28). In other words, a more liberal sexuality replaced the Victorian repression. Woolf used this freedom to write a book about a person with an ambiguous gender identity and sexuality, who combined faculties of both men and women to show the reader that sexuality does not have to be absolute. Rather, it is better to be a combination of masculine and feminine aspects, as it

leads to a better understanding of life, according to Woolf. Where Woolf wrote about sexuality as fluid, Hall on the other hand showed sexuality as something fixed. In *The Well of Loneliness*, she wanted to educate her readers about sexual inversion, because she was an invert herself. She wrote about how difficult it was to be a man in a woman's body, and the problems she had to face in society, whereas Woolf wrote about opportunities. Where Stephen Gordon is acting like a man, desiring to be one, Orlando is both a man and a woman.

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