Engelse Taal en Cultuur

Teacher who will receive this document: Dr. U. Wilbers

Title of document: Bachelor Thesis *How to be both* a Metamodernist Work?

Name of course: BA Werkstuk Engelse Letterkunde

Date of submission: 16 June 2020

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Bachelor Thesis

How to be both a metamodernist work?

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* as an inspiration for the resurfacing of modernism in Ali Smith's *How to be both*

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Introduction

"Ali Smith is one of our greatest living novelists, the Virginia Woolf of our times," Alex Preston writes in *The Guardian*.[1] When one longs for modernist works Ali Smith is recommended by Preston. He exclaims one should "read everything!" of her hand.[2] Patrick Flannery writes in *The Telegraph* that "[o]ne might reasonably argue that Ali Smith is among Virginia Woolf's most gifted inheritors."[3] In the early twenty-first-century, more authors, critics and publishers relate contemporary work to modernism, as is illustrated in the previous quotes.[4] According to the article "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution" by scholars David James and Urmila Seshagiri this revival of modernism in the twenty-first-century is part of metamodernism.[5] The concept metamodernism is coined in several studies. The research of James and Seshagiri is considered to be one of the two key texts in the literary field.[6] In their research, metamodernism is approached as a product of looking back to the beginning of the twentieth century and using aspects of modernism in twenty-first-century literature. Modernism is thus compared to a "cultural archive" of sorts.[7]

Modernism is a movement which dominated the arts and culture between 1900-1940, and was present in every cultural field: architecture, music, visual arts and literature. All certainties, rules and customs of the arts were questioned and often rejected. It thus set tradition aside quite thoroughly. Even today, the aftereffects of modernism can still be felt.[8] It has been an important

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[1] Alex Preston, "Book Clinic: Which European Fiction Will Revive My Love of Modernist Novels?," *The Guardian*, 15 June, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jun/15/book-clinic-modernist-fiction-in-translation.

[2] Alex Preston, "Book Clinic: Which European Fiction Will Revive My Love of Modernist Novels?," *The Guardian*, 15 June, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jun/15/book-clinic-modernist-fiction-in-translation.

[3] Patrick Flannery, "How to be Both by Ali Smith: Brimming With Pain and Joy," *The Telegraph*, October 14, 2014, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/11061768/How-to-Be-Both-by-AliSmith-review-brimming-with-pain-and-joy.html.

[4] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "A Tale of Two Labels: The Use of 'Modernism' and 'Avant Garde' in the Reception of Tom McCarthy's *C*," (Academic article, 2020), 2-3.

[5] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution," *PMLA* 129, no. 1 (2014): 87.

[6] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "Introduction: Metamodernism," *English Studies* 99, 7 (2018), 719.

[7] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 88.

[8] Peter Barry, "Beginning Theory an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory," (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 78.

part of the culture of the beginning of the twentieth century. This period in time cannot be understood without taking this cultural trend into account.[9]

At first, modernism and its experimentality received much negative criticism. The literary trend was seen as an undesired form of innovation within a society that was already renewing itself completely. Michael Levenson observes the following, which illustrates it poignantly: "[e]ven in the midst of pervasive change, of transformation everywhere, the new art was seen as a rival and threatening modernity. There was novelty on both sides, yes, but modernist novelty was seen as dangerous and contagious. Madness was the favored metaphor (art as lunacy)".[10] The nineteenth century had resulted in many changes which shook up reality as it was known. Jessica Berman states in *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics and Transnational Modernism* that literary modernism arose together with the general emergence of modernity, which was present in almost all aspects of society.[11] Examples of this broad presence of modernity are Charles Darwin who presented his theory of the survival of the fittest; Freud who researched the unconsciousness through psychoanalyses, but also the industrial revolution. According to Levenson modernism was "not a collision between novelty and tradition but a *contest of novelties*, a struggle to define the trajectory of the new."[12] Due to all these new developments on different levels of society, tradition was not the right fundament to build further on a literary trend. Modernism needed to renew literature completely and therefore had to break with tradition. It set the status quo aside to renew literature from the bottom up, and can therefore not be seen as a collision with the already existing literature. In the 1920's the influence of modernism had already had such an impact that it could not be easily ignored or depreciated anymore. This did not mean people were not still critical, but as Levenson states "the rights of experiment had been established."[13] The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 influenced modernism and according to Levenson it changed its course. Even though it was an awful historical event in itself, it provided opportunities to develop modernism.[14] War could not be ignored, not in real life nor in literature, and it impacted both heavily. James Joyce's *Ulysses* can

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[9] Peter Barry, 78.

[10] Michael Levenson, "Modernism," (Yale: Yale University Press, 2011), 5.

[11] Jessica Berman, "Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism," (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 32-33.

[12] Michael Levenson, 5.

[13] Michael Levenson, 219.

[14] Michael Levenson, 220.

for example be recognised as pacifistic and at the same time as highly modernist.[15] David James and Urmila Seshagiri conclude the same on the relation of the war and modernism. They state that the First World War "took almost forty million lives and rendered all subsequent formal innovation inseparable from cultural devastation".[16]

The years between 1910 and 1930 are called High Modernism. In this period of twenty years many influential writers and poets wrote their modernist works.[17] Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* is also written during this blooming period, namely in 1928. Modernism's manifestation in literature is very clear, mainly because modernist writers preferred experimental forms of writing which rejected all the traditional forms of realism.[18] Modernism was followed by Postmodernism. This western philosophy arose in the late twentieth century. Its main characteristics were scepticism, subjectivism and relativism. It deconstructed many ideologies dating back to the Enlightment and perceived reality as a conceptual construct instead of a given fact.[19] Scholars Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble and Leigh Wilson state the following on the natural end of Postmodernism in the two-thousands: "(it) had become widely accepted thus achieving any aesthetic, philosophical or political goals it might have had."[20] It is being debated if postmodernism can still be called a cultural trend, for it is almost completely integrated into the contemporary western society, as Bentley, Hubble and Wilson illustrate.

Beside the research of James and Seshagiri, the research of Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker is considered to be a key text in the field of metamodernism, namely their study "Notes on metamodernism".[21] Together with James and Seshagiri they think that metamodernism is a reaction to the alleged end of postmodernism. The difference, however, is the role they assign to postmodernism in the development of metamodernism. Vermeulen and van den Akker clearly incorporate postmodernism in the formation of metamodernism. James and Seshagiri, on the other side, reach back from metamodernism all the way to modernism without taking postmodernism into consideration. Considering the fact that this thesis will

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[15] Michael Levenson, 222.

[16] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 87.

[17] Peter Barry, 79.

[18] Peter Barry, 79.

[19] Brian, Duignan. "Postmodernism and Relativism," Encyclopædia Britannica (September 20, 2019), https://www.britannica.com/topic/postmodernism-philosophy/Postmodernism-and-relativism.

[20] Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble and Leigh Wilson, *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 15.

[21] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "Introduction: Metamodernism," *English Studies* 99, 7 (2018), 719.

analyse the manifestation of metamodernism in terms of James and Seshagiri in a contemporary novel, postmodernism will not be discussed elaborately.

Because of the supposed end of postmodernism, a new literary trend – or a reoccurrence of an old acquaintance – has arisen. More and more authors relate their work to modernism; they style, according to James and Seshagiri, "their twenty-first-century literary innovations as explicit engagements with the innovations of early-twentieth-century writing." [22] Some scholars identify this trend as metamodernism; James and Seshagiri in particular. Metamodernism is a term which is still being defined and heavily researched. It is therefore not yet a clear-cut determined literary or cultural trend. Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers state that the implications of metamodernism are still, in 2018 at least, unclear"[23] Two finished studies on coining metamodernism differ in their definition. Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker relate modernism strongly to the postmodern collapse and link it to the cultural context of architecture, art and film. David James and Urmila Seshagiri relate it back to a period in history and focus more on metamodernism as a trend in literary fiction.

In this thesis, the theoretical framework of the latter research is used. It supports the interpretation of metamodernism as a cultural archive, and this is in line with the hypothesis of Ali Smith reaching back to the modernist characteristics of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) in her contemporary novel *How to be both* (2014). This thesis will research if *How to be both* can indeed be regarded as a metamodernist novel in which Smith made use of the cultural archive named modernism. Smith's book will be a case study for the corresponding theoretical framework. Links have already been made between Woolf and Smith in reviews of Smith's work in among others *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. *How to be both* has also been directly related to metamodernism. Nick Lavery states: "Ali Smith's *How to be both* (2014) (…) can be read as employing a metamodernist approach to the depiction of subjective consciousness."[24] The research question resulting from this is: "How does Ali Smith incorporate Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* modernist characteristics in *How to be both*, and how is *How to be both* by doing so a metamodernist novel considering the theory of David James and Urmila Seshagiri?"

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[22] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 87.
[23] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "Introduction: Metamodernism," *English Studies* 99, 7 (2018), 720.
[24] Nick Lavery, "Consciousness and the Extended Mind in the "Metamodernist" Novel," *English Studies* 99, no. 7 (2018), 755.

This will be studied through analyses of the literary movement(s) and thorough close-readings of both books.

David James and Urmila Seshagiri look in retrospect at modernism and conclude it has been approached as a very Eurocentric literary trend, while it should be placed in much broader geographical context[25]. They ask the question if the 'when' of modernism needs to change when you broaden the 'where'.[26, 27] This thesis focuses on two British novels and therefore remains within the Anglo-European perspective on modernism. The time corresponding to this geographical perspective is the period from 1900-1940, and that will thus be addressed as the period of modernism. Even though it is acknowledged that periodising literature is an arbitrary act as it sets artificial barriers which are transitory, this periodicity is needed to set a base for mapping out all the ways that contemporary fiction interconnects consciously with modernism "through the inheritance of formal principles and ethicopolitical imperatives that are recalibrated in the context of new social or philosophical concerns."[28]

In *Beginning Theory an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Peter Barry states that fluidity, and corresponding to this blurring boundaries, is one of the features of modernism. It appreciates fragmentation and has a high level of reflecting oneself.[29] These characteristics resulted in literary works rejecting the supposed foundation of literature at that time, and were considered experimental and innovative. Besides being a stylistic characteristic, these features are used to diverge from the status quo and therefore contain a more political layer as well.[30] This research applies these characteristics to the themes of the conventionally perceived binarity of gender and the mental and physical experience of time as linear.

Virginia Woolf makes use of these modernist characteristics in *Orlando*, and is therefore a poignant example of modernism. Dudly M. Marchi sates in *Comparative Literature Studies* that Woolf forms her own "hybridic dynamism"[31] by setting (male) tradition aside. He focuses on

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[25] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 90.

[26] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 90.

[27] David James and Urmila Seshagiri elaborate on this critique on modernism, but do not shape their theory accordingly. They also have a Anglo-American perspective, and thus do not incorporate this critique on modernism in their theory of metamodernism.

[28] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 91-92.

[29] Peter Barry, 79.

[30] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 93.

[31] Dudley M. Marchi, "Virginia Woolf Crossing the Borders of History, Culture and Gender: The Case of Montaigne, Pater, and Gournay," *Comparative Literature Studies* 34, 1 (1997): 2.

Woolf crossing boundaries of history, culture and gender, and according to him *Orlando* functions as an illustration of this. James and Seshagiri also address Woolf's writing style and state that she "defamiliarizes novelistic logic about (…) time, endowing her self-referential sentence with an artistic autonomy that resists demystification." [32] These highly modernist characteristics can also be recognised in *How to be both*, which explains why critics are comparing both novels.

 How is metamodernism related to the early twentieth-century modernism? How are they similar? How do they deviate from one another? James and Seshagiri research the contemporary form of modernism in contemporary fiction.[33] They argue that metamodernism does not repeat the familiar characteristics of modernism all together, even though it does contain among others the traits irony and fragmentation. These traits are also apparent in post-modernism, but James and Seshagiri do not address this in their research. They solely focus on the modernism of the early twentieth century and the contemporary resurfacing in the twenty-first-century. The interaction between these forms of modernism is defined by them as follows: "Metamodernism regards modernism as an era, an aesthetic, and an archive that originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The dominant postures of this literary corpus, therefore, clash with the current academic understanding of modernism as a temporally and spatially complex global impulse."[34] Modernism has a certain aim to continue moving further by means of looking into the past, and with this aim it contains the same novel energy as modernist's works used to have only adjusted to contemporary times.[35] This differs, according to James and Seshagiri, from postmodernism through its use of "self-conscious, consistent visions of dissent and defamiliarization as novelistic inventions specific to the early twentieth century."[36] The style of metamodernism is not only aesthetically pleasing, but has a political layer as well. This can be recognised in the canonical modernist period as well. They both serve a larger purpose, often addressing political or ethical matters. In *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011), Neil Lazarus argues that modernist writing after the determined modernist period is "a writing that resists the accommodationism of what has been canonized as modernism and that does what at least some

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[32] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 92.
[33] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 88.
[34] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 88.
[35] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 93.
[36] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 93.

modernist work has done from the outset – namely, says 'no'; refuses integration, resolution, consolation, comfort; protests and criticises."[37] This quote can be perceived in the light of the narrow modernism corpus with its Eurocentric perspective, or it can be perceived in the light of metamodernism. James and Seshagiri state that the inventiveness of modernism is precisely what characterises metamodernism, for it explores the possibilities within literature and undermines conventions on narratives.[38] Metamodernism can thus be seen as a tribute to modernism.[39]

According to Sonya Andermah in *Contemporary Women's Writing*, Ali Smith refuses binary oppositions in gender: "Smith represents gender as a fluid category allowing women and men, in the realm of art at least, to be both."[40] Andermah states that the modernist characteristic of the novel are "simultaneously self-consciously aesthetic and political."[41] Smith herself stated that "modernism bequeaths to writers now."[42] One could thus state that characteristics of modernism are used in the literature of the early twenty-first-century, at least in Smith's work. Critic James Wood states that one can "detect the influence of Virginia Woolf (fluid interior monologue, an interest in artists, and in genderless creativity)" in Ali Smith's work.[43] These substantive similarities between Woolf and Smith did thus not remain unnoticed.

This study will therefore research how Ali Smith reaches back to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* concerning modernist characteristics in *How to be both*, and if *How to be both* by doing so can be considered a metamodernist novel taking the theory of David James and Urmila Seshagiri into account. The focus will lie on the crossing of conventional boundaries of gender and time in both novels, and on how this is done concerning among other things the used literary techniques.

This research question is relevant because modernism seems to resurface in contemporary times. Critics, writers and publishers are using the term again, roughly one hundred years after the

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[37] Neil Lazarus, "1 - The politics of postcolonial modernism," in *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31.

[38] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 92.

[39] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 93.

[40] Sonya Andermah, "Both/And Aesthetics: Gender, Art, and Language in Brigid Brophy's *In Transit* and Ali Smith's *How to Be Both*," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 12, 2 (2018), 249.

[41] Sonya Andermah, 249.

[42] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 96.

[43] James Wood, "The Power of the Literary Pun," *The New Yorker*, 22 January, 2018. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/29/the-power-of-the-literary-pun

modernist trend in the early twenty-century.[44] As a reaction to the reoccurrence of the use of this term academics started analysing and defining this supposedly new literary movement. Many parallels can be drawn between Woolf's *Orlando* and Smith's *How to be both*, regarding the theme of gender fluidity, but also the typical modernist stylistics such as the self-reflectivity and the stream of consciousness technique. This research could contribute to the current debate on metamodernism. Is this new trend truly apparent in *How to be both*? An addition to the definition process of metamodernism can be made by this specific case study. The relevance of this thesis lies in the fact that it conducts a concrete case study of one of the theories on metamodernism that has not been done before. By doing so it can further elaborate the concept of metamodernism as a contemporary literary concept.

The outline of this research is as follows; the first chapter will illustrate and outline the contemporary debate on the resurfacing of modernism. It will set forth the key sources on metamodernism in the literary field, so both the article of David James and Urmila Seshagiri and the article of Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker will be discussed and compared. The second chapter will analyse the concept of time discussed in both novels. It examines the modernist characteristic of crossing boundaries and how this is done in both novels concerning the physical and mental experience of time, and the concept of time being linear. Besides both novels among others the studies of Bryony Randall "The day of Orlando", and Jorge Sacido-Romero "Ghostly Visitations in Contemporary Short Fiction by Women: Fay Weldon, Janice Galloway and Ali Smith" will be used. It will be analysed if one can state that Ali Smith has been inspired by Woolf's modernist tradition in *Orlando* regarding crossing the boundaries of the conventional experience of time, and if Smith's approach on this in *How to be both* is in line with Woolf's in *Orlando*. The third chapter will be similar to the second one, only this chapter will analyse the crossing of boundaries considering gender. It will be researched how the modernist characteristic of crossing and blurring boundaries is apparent in both novels concerning the constructed binarity of gender. Besides the literary analyses of both novels, among others the studies by Karen Kaivola "Revisiting Woolf's Representations of Androgyny: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Nations" and Sonya Andermah "Both/And Aesthetics: Gender, Art,

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[44] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "A Tale of Two Labels: The Use of 'Modernism' and 'Avant Garde' in the Reception of Tom McCarthy's *C*," (Academic article, 2020), 2-3.

and Language in Brigid Brophy's In *Transit* and Ali Smith's *How to Be Both*" will be used. It will be analysed if one can state that Smith has looked at and made use of Virginia Woolf's modernist tradition in *Orlando* concerning crossing boundaries in the binarity of gender, and if her approach in *How to be both* is based on Woolf's approach in her novel. Ultimately, these analyses will be combined and synthesised, so an answer will be provided to the research question on how Smith incorporates *Orlando*'s modernist characteristics in *How to be both,* and, thus, how the latter can be interpreted as a metamodernist novel in light of the theory proposed by James and Seshagiri.

Chapter 1: The Contemporary Debate on Metamodernism

In the early twenty-first-century "[t]he postmodern years of plenty, pastiche, and parataxis are over," according to Vermeulen and van den Akker.[45] They and other scholars called this new trend, which is sequential to postmodernism, metamodernism. The reason why the postmodern seemed to have faded and made way for a new trend is hard to pinpoint. Some argue that it had become so engrained in society that it had achieved all its goals and therefore simply ended.[46] Other suggestions are that the postmodern did not fade gradually at all, but disappeared due to among other things climate change and the digital revolution, or that its ending was a continuous development caused by less tangible events such as "the integration of *différance* into mass culture", but also queer theory and postcolonialism are mentioned as possible determiners of the ending of postmodernism.[47]

Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers research the return to the label modernism in the beginning of the twentieth-first-century, because writers, reviewers and publishers use this label while describing contemporary works.[48] They state it is demonstrably present in several segments of the literary field, from academia to reviewers.[49] In October 2015 several international scholars assembled in Nijmegen for a research seminar on the reoccurrence of Modernism in contemporary literature. They established a network and published a special edition of *English Studies* in 2018, based on this first meeting.[50] The articles "Notes on metamodernism" and "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution" are two key articles in the literary field concerning metamodernism, for they clearly posit a definition of this new trend. The edition of *English Studies* on this topic shows that other scholars react to these set definitions, mostly to the interpretation of Vermeulen and van den Akker. Both these essential

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[45] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, "Notes on metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 2, 1 (2017), 2.
[46] Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, and Leigh Wilson, 15.
[47] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 2-3.
[48] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "A Tale of Two Labels: The Use of 'Modernism' and 'Avant Garde' in the Reception of Tom McCarthy's *C*," (Academic article, 2020), 2-3.
[49] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, 15.
[50] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, 3.

articles will be elaborated on in this chapter. Other interpretations will also be analysed to enlighten the contemporary discussion on metamodernism.

Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker address several interpretations of the cultural trend of the early twenty-first-century. Among them are hypermodernism by Gilles Lipovetsky, digimodernism or pseudomodernism by Alan Kirby, and automodernism by Robert Samuels. Vermeulen and van den Akker argue that these concepts are more radicalisations of postmodernism than restructured concepts.[51] On top of those, another concept has been coined by Nicholas Bourriaud: the altermodernism. This cultural trend is a "synthesis between modernism and post-colonialism."[52] According to Bourriaud societies across the world live at various levels of modernity and are comparable to an island chain without a clear center.[53] Vermeulen and van den Akker criticise his concept by stating that "Bourriaud perceives that the form and function of the arts have changed, but he cannot understand how and why they have changed. In order to close this critical gap, he simply assumes that experience and explanation are one and the same."[54] According to them he thus assumes that epistemology and ontology are the same, which they view as a flaw in his research.

The critical gap that Bourriaud leaves open will be filled by the theory of Vermeulen and van den Akker. They state that when one supposes modernism equals idealism, and postmodernism equals scepticism, "the current generation's attitude can be conceived of as a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism."[55] According to Kersten and Wilbers one of the key phrases of the essay is that the contemporary cultural trend "seeks forever for a truth that it never expects to find."[56, 57] Vermeulen and van den Akker perceive modernism as a structure of feeling.[58] They focus mainly on the metamodern swinging between modernism and postmodernism as a pendulum; as soon as enthusiasm tends to become fanaticism something interferes which makes it ironic again, but this is maintained so it will not become apathic.[59] On

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[51] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 3.
[52] Nicholas Bourriaud, *Altermodern: Tate Triennal 2009* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 12.
[53] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 3.
[54] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 14.
[55] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 5.
[56] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, 3.
[57] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 5.
[58] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "Introduction: Metamodernism," *English Studies* 99, 7 (2018), 719.
[59] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 6.

this apparent duality Wit Pietrzak, one of the scholars who contributed to the *English Studies* edition, states that it combines modernist playfulness with postmodernist seriousness.[60] Why, then, is "Notes on metamodernism" not a radicalisation of postmodernism, as are the concepts of Kirby, Lipovetsky and Samuels? Vermeulen and van den Akker's concept of metamodernism uses pluralism and irony in a different manner than postmodernism did. It uses both these literary tools to oppose the contemporary aspiration, while postmodernism utilises these to cancel it out.[61] Their concept does nevertheless not address literature directly, and focuses more on architecture, art and film. Due to this focal point, their theory is not poignant for this research. Another argument not to use their theory as a theoretical framework is the fact that Vermeulen and van den Akker's concept has no special direct relationship with modernism, as stated by Kersten and Wilbers. [62] While this thesis focuses on and wants to analyse the relationship between this new metamodernism and the modernism of the beginning of the twentieth century. "Notes on metamodernism" still provides in-depth knowledge to the concept of metamodernism. In their conclusion they touch for example upon the modernist aim to blur boundaries, which is centralised in this thesis. On this they state "the metamodern (…) exposes itself through a-topic metaxis.", which means it is a compromise, the middle road, but without boundaries.[63] According to Vermeulen and van den Akker it is "a position without parameters."[64] Even though they do not link this directly to literature, this ties in perfectly with the stylistic characteristics of both modernism and metamodernism, and the studied themes of gender and time in this thesis.

The research of David James and Urmila Seshagiri deliberately focusses on literature specifically. They want to give "a retrospective understanding of modernism as a moment as well as a movement."[65] In contrast to "Notes on metamodernism", postmodernism does not weigh heavily in this research. It aims to differentiate itself with other studies by going back to the logic of periodisation.[66] Kersten and Wilbers state on this that the label metamodernism of

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[60] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "Introduction: Metamodernism," *English Studies* 99, 7 (2018), 721.
[61] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 6.
[62] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "A Tale of Two Labels: The Use of 'Modernism' and 'Avant Garde' in the Reception of Tom McCarthy's *C*," (Academic article, 2020), 15.
[63] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 12.
[64] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 12.
[65] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 88.
[66] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 88.

James and Seshagiri is important, for it is "a term they use to periodise and, thus, separate what might be called 'historical Modernism' and its resurfacing in fiction from a different historical context -i.e. our own."[67] The approach of James and Seshagiri is very suitable for a case study like the one in this thesis for it supports the idea of reaching back to the beginning of the twentieth century. It analyses several approaches to modernism and the contemporary manifestation of it, and comes to the following conclusion that modernism "consistently returns its scrutinizers to the early twentieth century."[68] This essence to which all branches of twenty-first-century modernism return, lies at the heart of metamodernism.[69] Metamodernism does not copy modernism, according to James and Seshagiri. Its aim is to use its energies, its aspirations in contemporary times to move further.[70] This idea is shared by Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble and Leigh Wilson, for they state in their book that twenty-first-century authors "self-consciously returned to modernist techniques as a way of return to a pre-postmodernist aesthetics."[71] Both agree, thus, on perceiving this contemporary cultural trend irrespective of the postmodernist period that has supposedly ended, and they differ in this respect from Vermeulen and van den Akker. James and Seshagiri conclude with the statement that "the twenty-first-century novelists surveyed here remind us that modernism's formal promises for narrative fiction will make political, ethical, and aesthetic sense in the future only if modernism denotes a historically precise activity instead of connoting radical artistic responses to every modernity's upheavals."[72] This thesis will research if *How to be both* is in line with this statement, and thus if Smith's novel can be seen as directly influenced by Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.

The theory of James and Seshagiri will be used to analyse both novels. The main focus will lay on the modernistic characteristic, which can also be recognised in metamodernism, of crossing boundaries. *How to be both* and *Orlando* have many similarities in which the use of modernism as a cultural archive can be perceived. Examples of these similarities are the acknowledgement of subjectivity of the protagonist's gaze, its self-reflective elements, but also the stream of consciousness technique and the authentic lack of use of interpunction. This thesis

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[67] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "A Tale of Two Labels: The Use of 'Modernism' and 'Avant Garde' in the Reception of Tom McCarthy's *C*," (Academic article, 2020), 15.
[68] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 91.
[69] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 92.
[70] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 93.
[71] Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble and Leigh Wilson, 17.
[72] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 97.

chooses to focus on the crossing of boundaries in regard of binarity of gender and linearity of time. This choice is made due to the limited scope of this thesis, but also due to the high notability of these specific two themes within both novels.

Chapter 2: Crossing the boundaries of the concept of linear time in *Orlando* and *How to be both*

In the modernist literary tradition blurring and crossing conventional boundaries is very common.[73] This chapter will explore this modernist trait in relation to time and the conventions surrounding the linearity of time. In *Modernism, Time Machines, and the Defamiliarization of Time* (2015) Charles M. Tung argues that "[i]n the face of capitalism's standardization and regulation of time, the acceleration of changes in social life, (…) writers and artists are said to have moved inward to explore the workings of memory, the pathos of finitude, and the intensities of fugitive moments."[74] These developments in the prelude of modernism influenced the art and literature of that time. Scholar Adam Barrows states that "the dominant critical tendency has been to treat modernist time as a purely philosophical exploration of private consciousness, disjointed from the forms of material and public temporality that standard time attempted to organize."[75] Barrows's statement is in line with Tung's. According to Tung this is characteristic for a "modernist aesthetic". He states that modernism does not simply use literary techniques to play with the experiences surrounding time for the sake of it, it also reflects on the concept 'time' as a whole.[76] The experience of time in modernist literature is thus mostly present in one's consciousness. Tung states that modernism could be considered to be a time machine in its literary manifestations.[77] Hence, modernism offers techniques and approaches which challenge the concept of linear time experiences. Modernism is utilised in such way that it questions conventions surrounding time by portraying counter ideas. It challenges linearity of time by playing with memories, flashbacks, time traveling and immorality in a very fragmented, fluid way where connections are not immediately visible and experiences merge into each other. This can be recognised in both discussed works of Virginia Woolf and Ali Smith. This chapter will discuss the reconceptualisation of time illustrated in *Orlando* and *How to be both*, and in which manner the latter is in line with the former novel concerning this modernist tradition.

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[73] Peter Barry, 79.
[74] Charles M. Tung, "Modernism, Time Machines, and the Defamiliarization of Time," *Configurations* 23, 1 (2015), 95.
[75] Adam Barrows, *The Cosmic Time of Empire: Modern Britain and World Literature*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 7. Accessed April 7, 2020.
[76] Charles M. Tung, 93-94.
[77] Charles M. Tung, 93-94.

Orlando and Time

Virginia Woolf's fictional biography *Orlando* is rather explicit concerning traveling through time. The narrative of the main character, after which the novel is named, takes place in three centuries, to which the reader is introduced in fragmented pieces. The novel starts when Orlando is a nobleman during Elizabeth I's reign, and ends on the eleventh of October in 1928 when Orlando is a female writer. During their[78] life Orlando gets no older than thirty-six. Throughout Orlando's (time) travels and personal journey Woolf challenges the concept of time as it was perceived in pre-modernist literature.

In *Trespassing Boundaries: Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction* (2004) the following link is made: "a typical story by Virginia Woolf could be a model of Frank O'Connor's definition of the genre as a 'significant moment' from which 'past, present and future may be viewed simultaneously'"[79] This connection between O'Connor's theory and Orlando's perception of life is very accurate, for many aspects of their life are intertwined and reoccur. In their experiences, time is thus not linear and clearly defined, but happens all in the same moment by means of memory. Nick Greene, a famous writer and literary critic who Orlando meets for the first time in the Elizabethan era, can be perceived as an embodiment of Orlando's memory. Greene reoccurs throughout the different time periods. When they meet him again in the Victorian age Orlando exclaims: "[i]ndeed she could have sworn that she had heard him say the very same things three hundred years ago. (…) Nick Greene had not changed, for all his knighthood."[80] He follows Orlando not only in their head as a memory, but also in the physical spheres and thus literally connects past with present.

The date when Woolf presented *Orlando* to Vita Sackville-West, the woman on whom Orlando is based and for whom the novel is written, was the exact same date as the last day covered in the novel; both the eleventh of October in 1928.[81] This adds an extra dimension to the story. Scholar Bryony Randall states on this: "Woolf thus again creates a double temporality: one that will forever remain frozen as the present historic of the novel's tense, and one in which two October elevenths, and two Vitas, co-existed for a single day more than three-quarters of a

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[78] The pronoun used to address Orlando in this thesis will be 'they'. The book changes its use of pronouns halfway, so it is decided to be consequent in the use of the ungendered pronoun in this thesis.

[79] Kathryn N. Benzel and Ruth Hoberman, eds, *Trespassing Boundaries: Virginia Woolf's Short Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 19.

[80] Virginia Woolf, 194.

[81] Sandra M. Gilbert, introduction to *Orlando*, ed. Brenda Lyons (London: Penguin Books, 1993), xi-xii.

century ago."[82] This sense of a double temporality comes back several times in the novel, for the longer Orlando lives the more they associate objects and actions with similarities of the past. Memories are closely linked to these interconnections. At the beginning of their journey Orlando states that: "[m]emory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither. We know not what comes next, of what follows after." Memories are here compared to "disconnected fragments".[83] This (dis)connectedness is a recurring theme in *Orlando*, as it seems to grow on the protagonist. The novel changes from emphasising disconnectedness to underlining interconnectedness. When Orlando has arrived in 1928, they state the following which illustrates everything being connected to each other: "'[t]ime has passed over me,' she thought (…) Nothing is any longer one thing. I take up a handbag and I think of an old bumboat woman frozen in the ice. Someone lights a pink candle and I see a girl in Russian trousers."[84] Objects and experiences have received a double meaning, because Orlando links them to memories of the past. Due to the extent of their life, Orlando recognises a lot of elements of the past in objects or experiences of today. The actions of the present are thus not absolute, but multi-layered and connected to the past. They contain their present moment meaning, but Orlando's mind assigns an extra meaning, a connotation, to it from the past. This corresponds with Barrows's statement on modernist portrayal of time taking place in one's consciousness.[85] Orlando recognises why certain memories pop up and what their source is in the contemporary world. Orlando analyses their memories from the start of the novel up until the end, but their conclusion changes. While they first concluded on memories being "disconnected fragments" they later on conclude that nothing is merely one thing anymore, which suggests a strong connectedness.[86, 87]

Modernism is known for its fragmented character, but at the same time for its fluid style. It actively deconstructs common views and the status quo by using among others these two techniques.[88] One could argue that the change in Orlando's perception of memories from disconnected to interconnected illustrates a distancing movement from the fragmented tradition

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[82]Byrony Randall, "The Day of Orlando," In *Sentencing Orlando: Virgina Woolf and the Morphology of the Modernist Sentece*, ed. Elsa Högberg and Amy Bromley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 135. Accessed April 7, 2020.

[83] Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, ed. Brenda Lyons (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 55.

[84] Virginia Woolf, 210.

[85] Adam Barrows, 7.

[86] Virginia Woolf, 55.

[87] Virginia Woolf, 210.

[88] Peter Barry, 79.

and a tendency towards the fluid tradition in modernism. Woolf was familiar with these techniques and has applied them both in *Orlando*. An example of this fragmentation is Woolf's portrayal of Orlando's journey through time. The narrative is not one coherent image, but more randomly chosen fragments throughout Orlando's life alternated with comments of the biographer, who reacts on the elements chosen for this narrative. An example of this is the following:

> [i]t is, indeed, highly unfortunate, and much to be regretted that at this stage of Orlando's career, when he played a most important part in the public life of his country, we have least information to go upon. (…) We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain; but often is has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to use the imagination.[89]

This passage addresses the fragmented character of the story directly, and illustrates the manner in which the biographer interrupts the narrative. Conversely, Orlando experiencing the past and the present fluidly due to their memories shows that Virginia Woolf goes beyond the fragmented modern traditions in this, and emphasises the extent to which it is all intertwined, boundaryless even. This results in a certain paradox. She thus deconstructs a conventional concept by emphasising the connectedness of these supposed separate tenses, and presents all of it in rather fragmented parts. This approach contributes to the "defamiliarization of novelistic logic and resistance of demystification" that James and Seshagiri assign to Woolf's literary work.[90] The way *Orlando* portrays time can be seen as a combination between fluidity and fragmentation, which perhaps first seems paradoxical, but result in a highly modernist work with modernist traits on several dimensions.

A characteristic of modernist literature, according to Steven Connor, is focusing on thoughts that occur in a relatively short period of time, and present them in a very concentrated narrative.[91] In Peter Barry's book this same technique is called the 'stream-of-consciousness'

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[89] Virginia Woolf, 84.
[90] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 92.
[91] Steven Connor, "Postmodernism and Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steven Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68.

technique[92]. This technique is complementary to Barows's statement on time taking place in one's private consciousness in modernist literature.[93] Even though *Orlando* covers three centuries and thus considerably more time than for example Woolf's book *Mrs Dalloway* -which covers one day- the last day of *Orlando* is completely in line with this tradition addressed by Connor. It somehow breaks with the fragmented illustration of the passing of ages in the rest of the book. Randall states on this that *Orlando* thus still contains these modernist techniques of "concentration and condensation" in this last day, even though it may not appear as explicitly in the rest of the narrative.[94] This last day is, according to Randall, filled with "challenges to her sense of self, visitations by figures from her past, visions of her centuries-long life, and the collapse of landscapes into each other." and thus highly modernist.[95] All of these aspects can be found in the passage where Orlando returns to their house and remembers all the people they have welcomed there:

> [s]o she sat at the end of the gallery with her dogs couched round her, in Queen Elizabeth's hard arm-chair. (…) As her eyes peered down it, she could see people laughing and talking; the great men she had known; Dryden, Swift, and Pope; and statesmen in colloquy; and lovers dallying in the window-seats; and people eating and drinking at the long tables; and the wood smoke curling round their heads and making them sneeze and cough. Still further down, she saw sets of splendid dancers formed for the quadrille. A fluty, frail, but nevertheless stately music began to play. An organ boomed. A coffin was borne into the chapel. A marriage procession came out of it. (…) The long gallery filled itself thus, (…) Like thunder, the stable clock struck four. Never did any earthquake so demolish a whole town. The gallery and all its occupants fell to powder.[96]

This passage shows how vividly Orlando's thoughts are portrayed, and how the illustration of the activities happening inside their head do not differ from the actions physically taking place.

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[92] Peter Barry, 82.
[93] Adam Barrows, 7.
[94] Byrony Randall, 129-130.
[95] Byrony Randall, 132.
[96] Virginia Woolf, 219-220.

Barrows's argumentation is poignantly portrayed with this passage. Time in modernist literature is no more than a "philosophical exploration of private consciousness", and that is exactly what is illustrated here.[97]

Although the fluidity of time is a main theme in *Orlando*, some guidance is offered concerning this reconceptualisation. The fact that Orlando travels from past to present and the novel ends in Woolf's present moment suggests a chronological linearity. This structure offers a familiar framework on the reconceptualisation of time in this novel. Orlando's house does the same thing. Their house has 365 chambers and 52 corridors and represents the concept of time, for it mirrors the days and weeks of a year. At the end of the novel Orlando makes this comparison explicitly: "[i]t belonged to time now; to history; was past the touch and control of the living (…) a tunnel bored deep into the past."[98] Orlando thus hands over their home to time and decides to make it a part of the past, a memory, as if it lays down its function as a house and only the structure mirroring time remains. So, even though the mental experience of time merges with the physical experience of time, resulting in a fluid narrative in which time almost plays an arbitrary role for its randomness, some familiar structures can still be found in the chronological passing of time and the annual calendar shaped in the form of Orlando's house.

One reoccurring experience of Orlando, which becomes apparent through the typical modernist high self-reflectivity they have during the whole novel, is that they do not seem to fit into their context, whatever century that may be. Scholar Angeliki Spiropoulou argues that:

> immortal Orlando offers a historical understanding of every present, connecting it to the past while gesturing to futurity. And further, insofar as contemporaneity is a speculation on what it means to be in time, it is not just the basis of historical thinking, but also the foundation of the satiric writing which Orlando epitomises by making a case for being at once inside and outside what one's time defines as the limit of recognition.[99]

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[97] Adam Barrows, 7.
[98] Virginia Woolf, 219.
[99] Angeliki Spiropoulou, "Orlando Famoso: Obscurity, Fame and History in Orlando," in *Sentencing Orlando: Virginia Woolf and the Morphology of the Modernist Sentece*, ed. Elsa Högberg and Amy Bromley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 113-114. Accessed April 7, 2020.

This sense of feeling historically out of place is illustrated in the novel by the following thoughts of Orlando: "[f]or it is probable that the human spirit has its place in time assigned to it; some are born in this age, some of that; and now that Orlando was a grown woman, a year or two pas thirty indeed, the lines of her character were fixed and to bend them the wrong way was intolerable."[100] Orlando's simultaneous insider and outsiders view and their historical perspective on the times that pass are of much value for the narrative and the way Woolf portrays the history, for it is described from a partly subjective, partly omniscient view of one who has seen much more than just a few decades. According to Spiropoulou exactly that -the originality of Orlando as a character and the "ambiguous ontological status" concerning gender and their experience of time- makes this novel exceptional.[101] By utilising the technique of the stream-of-consciousness and adding many elements of self-reflection, Virginia Woolf shapes Orlando's contemplations and their fluid yet fragmented experiences of time in a typically modernist way.[102]

How to be both and time

Smith's novel is split in two. One half of the book concerns George, a teenage girl who is mourning her mother's death and living in the twenty-first-century. The other half concerns Francescho, an Italian painter in the renaissance who actually is a woman, but cross-dresses as a man to be allowed to perform the job of a painter. These lives, that seem to have nothing in common, are connected; the mother of George loved a fresco made by Francescho and the ghost of Francescho visits George, while she is watching one of her paintings in a museum. In an interview with *The New York Time* Ali Smith states that "Every great narrative is at least two narratives, if not more — the thing that is on the surface and then the things underneath which are invisible."[103] Smith has incorporated this clearly in *How to be both*, which is packed with double layers and interconnected narratives.

Travelling through time appears in several ways in Smith's novel. Francescho's ghost, who appears in George's life some 500 years after her own life, is a clear example of this. Smith

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[100]Virginia Woolf, 168.
[101]Angeliki Spiropoulou, 112.
[102] Peter Barry, 79, 82.
[103]Sarah Lyall, "An Onion of a Novel, Demanding to Be Peeled," *The New York Times*, 25 November, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/26/books/ali-smith-on-her-new-book-how-to-be-both.html.

is said to be able to create an "ambivalence concerning ghostly simulacra as both alienating (…) and liberating."[104] Francescho's perspective on George's life gives the story indeed, as seemed to be the aim of Smith, another dimension. On the one side, it reflects on certain habits in the twenty-first-century, for example the use of electronical devices: "this place is full of people who have eyes but choose to see nothing."[105] On the other side, the description of Francescho's life lets the reader realise which privileges that Francescho never had George already has. By the visitation of the ghost these two periods in time become so clearly connected, one cannot interpret them as two separate stories. Not only in the narrative but also in her writing techniques Smith's novel corresponds with Tung's statement on modernist literature being a manifestation of a time machine.[106]

How to be both embodies the reconceptualisation of time in an interesting manner. The novel was published in two editions: one edition opens with the story of Francescho, which makes the narrative to some extent chronological. The other edition opens with the story of George, which makes a part of the novel chronological, for Francescho's part starts at the end of George's part, but of course Francescho lived long before George was even born. It can thus be debated what chronological means in this respect, which would result in a rather modernist debate on the concept of time and chronology. This debate can be compared to George's mothers thoughts on the layers of a fresco: "But which came first? her mother says. (…) The picture underneath or the picture on the surface? The picture below came first, George says. Because it was done first. But the first thing we see, her mother said, and most times the only thing we see, is the one on the surface. So does that mean it comes first after all?"[107] Smith does thus not only question a certain linearity by printing her book in different versions, but she also addresses the concept of time and chronologicity explicitly in her work. This originality of printing her novel in two versions is perfectly in line with the modernist tradition of doing things differently. It links back to the statement James and Seshagiri made on metamodernism having the same inventiveness as modernism, as both trends explore ways to undermine conventions in literature, which Smith does exactly with her different prints of How to be both. [108]

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[104]Jorge Sacido-Romero, "Ghostly Visitations in Contemporary Short Fiction by Women: Fay Weldon, Janice Galloway and Ali Smith," Atlantis 39, 2 (2016), 95-96.
[105]Ali Smith, How to be both (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2015), 229.
[106] Charles M. Tung, 93-94.
[107]Ali Smith, 103.
[108] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 92.

The way Smith addresses the concept of time in her novel can also be seen as time travelling through memories. This modernist technique can be recognised in the following question of George's mother; she asks George if she has not considered "what the presence of the past might mean?" .[109] During the whole novel the presence of the past resonates: in the presence of Francescho's ghost, but also in the memories of George of her mother, and the attentive research to Francescho's art. In her interview with *The New York Times*, Smiths says that "[t]he "both" in her title means many things. (…) Experiencing the present and the past and the future all at once."[110] This is recognisable at the beginning of George's part, by George remembering her mother and being conscious of the tense in which she thinks about her: "George's mother says to George (…) Not says. Said. George's mother is dead."[111] Smith dares to take up space for this and other contemplations. These thoughts portrayed in this manner illustrate Barrows's statement on time being apparent in one's private consciousness.[112] In *How to be both* death is no definite state, but an ongoing conversation between the past and the present in one's mental experiences. The boundaryless middle road and the space for the in-between can be recognised in *How to be both*. Vermeulen and van den Akker address this as a typical metamodern aspect.[113]

In Francescho's narrative the simultaneousness of time is apparent in the nightmares from which she suffers. Francescho states: "If it were only dreams, it'd be easy, I said. I could deal with only dreams."[114] This suggests a certain weight of the past intertwined in the nightmares. The dreams can be seen as the past following her. This results in a narrative in which a ghost in the present thinks back on how her memories troubled her in the past. Time is thus not experienced as linear, but as a simultaneous occurrence of happenings and memories all merging with each other. By using memories in this way, scholar Emma Burris-Janssen argues that "Smith is practicing what Rosi Braidotti calls the 'as if' technique: she is rescuing what she needs from the past" so the present and its developments can be explained.[115] The use of

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[109] Ali Smith, 105.

[110] Sarah Lyall, "An Onion of a Novel, Demanding to Be Peeled," *The New York Times*, 25 November, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/26/books/ali-smith-on-her-new-book-how-to-be-both.html.

[111] Ali Smith, 3.

[112] Adam Barrows, 7.

[113] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 12.

[114] Ali Smith 329.

[115] Emma Burris-Janssen, "Homing the Unhomely," *The Hardy Society Journal* 14, 2 (2018), 64.

memories to create a mix of the past, present and future is a perfect illustration of the modernist genre according to Frank O'Connor's definition.[116] In this mix of tenses the fluid characteristic of modernism can be recognised.[117] Kathryn N. Benzel and Ruth Hoberman link O'Connor's definition to Virginia Woolf's fiction, but as this analyses shows it can in the same way be connected to Smith's *How to be both*.[118] In this way it provides an argument for Smith's work being in line with or inspired by Woolf's novel.

Besides memories, the arts also function as a certain form of time travelling. Art, frescoes and photographs illustrate how memories can become objects, and the past can thus become materialistic and truly live on after the death of the artist or the portrayed person. This can be seen in how George and H read about Francescho's life 500 years later due to George's mother's interest in one of her paintings, and also in the value that George assigns to the pictures of her mother. They are, after all, the last material memories she has of her. In the part of Francescho, the following statement is made: "cause pictures can be both life and death at once and cross the border between the two."[119] This relates back to both the art of Francescho, but also the photographs that George consciously shrines. Besides it being a reference to visual arts in the novel, it also addresses the modernist trait of crossing boundaries explicitly. The role of the memories and the arts embody the modern aesthetic of traveling through time as stated by Charles M. Tung.[120]

It is interesting to see that Ali Smith has included the passage of H and George looking up information on Francescho, as Smith herself must have been in the same situation while writing *How to be both*. Francescho is namely not just a fictional character. She is based on a real historic figure. In the article "The return of the 'real' in Ali Smith's Artful (2012) and How to Be Both (2014)" Yvonne Liebermann researches the real aspects of both fictional novels. She points out that the epigraph of *How to be both* contains a quote of this renaissance painter Francesco del Cossa. It is a part of a letter in which the painter asks for more money for their work, which request often returns in Smith's novel. On this factual evidence Smith based her whole take on the character for her novel. Liebermann states on this the following:

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[116] Kathryn N. Benzel and Ruth Hoberman, 19.
[117] Peter Barry, 78.
[118] Kathryn N. Benzel and Ruth Hoberman, 19.
[119] Ali Smith, 344.
[120] Charles M. Tung, 93-94.

[p]ositioning a quote from a historical document in an epigraph of a book which then features this historical figure as a fictional character, while also contesting some basic assumptions about said historical figure – as, for example, its sex – lays bare the slippery boundary between reality and fiction. While the account of Francesco is definitely connected to the real historical figure and the palace whose frescoes the text describes exists in reality, it at the same time goes beyond what is known and is thus both: a translation of a life during the Renaissance and an original which enriches history, opening it up for alternative ways to imagine the world.[121]

Liebermann thus shows how this technique of Smith enriches the novel and how it intertwines with reality. She even explicitly addresses it as a boundary crossing technique, and thus categorises it indirectly as modernist. The intertwining of reality with the narrative also works the other way around; the café of the museum where one can view Francesco's work sells Smith's novel.[122] The narrative is thus also intertwined with the reality. This way of merging reality and fiction is linked to the research of Vermeulen and van den Akker, and is perceived as metamodern by Liebermann.[123]

In an analysis by Ben Davies (2017) of Smith's short stories, he discusses her notable writing style, and makes certain points that can also be recognised in *How to be both*. Even though Francescho's part of the book is written in the past tense when reflecting on memories and in the present tense when it concerns thoughts of the ghost of Francescho, the part of George is completely written in the present tense. According to Davies:

the adoption of the present tense throughout offers something of an untensed view of time. This sense of an untensed temporality is also created and substantiated by the narrative structure: by reordering the usual sequence of beginning-middle-end, any sense of linearity and straightforward movement from the past to the present and the future is undermined, or at least challenged. (…) Overall, then, the continual use of the present

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[121] Yvonne Liebermann, "The return of the 'real' in Ali Smith's Artful (2012) and How to Be Both (2014)," *European Journal of English Studies* 23, 2 (2019), 144.

[122] Yvonne Liebermann, 149.

[123] Yvonne Liebermann, 144.

tense, and the temporal equivalence of each narrative section, forms a narrative in which time(s) seems to exist rather than pass.[124]

This analysis is not written about *How to be both*, but is still very relevant for the part of George and can clearly be identified in this novel. The fluidity of the passing and/or existing of time ad Davies mentions is clearly related to the modernist tradition described by Peter Barry.[125] When George is in Italy and watches the fresco of Francescho, she states the following: "[t]hings happen right at the front of the pictures and at the same time they continue happening, both separately and connectedly, behind, and behind that, and again behind that, like you can see, in perspective, for miles."[126] This passage illustrates how everything is connected and continues to happen simultaneously in the present tense. Rebecca Meacham summarises this very poignant in her review: "Separately and connectedly. Happening and happened. Both. Of course."[127] Ali Smith does not seem to find it necessary to choose between the past, present or future. The novel thus truly lives up to the title and is not one thing, but at least both. This aligns with James and Seshagiri's idea of metamodernism having the same energy as modernism, but mostly the aspiration to move further.[128]

The fact that both *Orlando* and *How to be both* deal with time, and the reconceptualisation of time, is clear. The way the authors employ the concept of time breaks through the boundaries of the idea that time is linear. In Woolf's novel the main character physically travels through time and lives a supposed immortal life, and they mentally experience plenty memories which portray the fluidity of time's linearity. Smith's novel partly has a more implicit illustration of the reconceptualisation of time by means of memories and art. These techniques can be perceived as a journey through time mentally, but she also introduces a ghost to the narrative which one can interpret as both mental and physical time traveling. These conclusions are completely in line with Charles M. Tung's statement that modernism is "a time machine in its literary

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[124] Ben Davies, "Address, Temporality and Misdelivery: The Postal Effects of Ali Smith's Short Stories," in *British Women Short Story Writers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 171.
[125] Peter Barry, 79.
[126] Ali Smith, 53.
[127] Rebecca Meacham, "Things underneath," *The Women's Review of Books* 32, 3 (2015), 32.
[128] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 92-93.

manifestations".[129] In the novels certain similarities can be found concerning the topic of blurring boundaries of the concept of time.

A key motif that is clearly present in both books is memory. By elaborating on the memories and the effects of them on the main characters, time becomes more fluid. Orlando experiences many feelings by remembering their past based on experiences they have in the present. Both George and Francescho are troubled but at the same time delighted by remembering their past and seem to get lost in their memories all together while thinking of them. George's mother states at one point: "You know, Georgie, nothing's not connected," which resounds Orlando's statement "nothing is any longer one thing".[130, 131] Comparing these analyses one notes that Woolf and Smith use different techniques of modernist writing to blur a certain sense of time. Woolf plays with the scope of the story covering three centuries, but at the same time one very elaborate day, and Smith is very conscious in her wording and use of tense. Both novelists are rather experimental in this way which is in line with the modernist tradition.[132] Woolf's scope in time is fragmented. The reader only receives elaborate fragments of the long history it covers. The way she dwells on details and thoughts, which are clearly visible in the last day the novel covers, is also highly modernist. Woolf's interpretation of Orlando's last day is a good example of the stream-of- consciousness technique.[133] This technique can be recognised in the elaborate portrayal of Orlando's thoughts during the fragments of their past, but also in the detailed description of the last day. Smith also makes use of this technique and emphasises self-refectory elements in her novel, which is another characteristic of modernism.[134] The conversations between George and her mother, but also the processes through which George goes in her thoughts, are examples of this. According to critic James Wood the influence of Woolf's "fluid interior monologue" can be sensed in Smith's take on this.[135] The way Smith consciously uses the tenses to talk about the past, present and future are characteristic for deviating from the status quo within traditional literature. Both writers create in their own way an

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[129] Charles M. Tung, 93-94.
[130] Ali Smith, 106.
[131] Virginia Woolf, 210.
[132] Peter Barry, 79.
[133] Peter Barry, 82.
[134] Peter Barry, 79.
[135] James Wood, "The Power of the Literary Pun," *The New Yorker*, 22 January, 2018. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/29/the-power-of-the-literary-pun

"untensed view on time" as Ben Davies calls it in his research on Smith, and they both succeed in revising the concept of time and perceiving it in a different light.[136]

Another parallel can be seen in the role that Orlando and Francescho serve as bridges between eras. Orlando offered "a historical understanding of every present, connecting it to the past while gesturing to the futurity", which could also be stated on Francescho who offered both alienation and liberation by her insider and outsider perspective.[137, 138] At one point in *Orlando*, it is even stated: "it was not Orlando who spoke, but the spirit of the age."[139] One could interpret the art they produced as the time travelling objects, instead of themselves as subjects. Francescho's work is still admired today, and Orlando travels through time together with their poem 'The Oak Tree'. When it is finished Orlando dies. The art will remain even when the artists have already passed away. Another aspect in which Orlando and Francescho resemble each other is the fact that they are both based on people who truly (have) existed. Orlando is based on Virginia Woolf's friend and lover Vita Sackville-West, and Francescho is based on the historic underexposed renaissance painter Francescho del Cossa. Both thus intertwine reality in their novels by making use of real people as an example or inspiration for their own fictional characters. Corresponding to this is the aspect that both Woolf and Smith create a double temporality by including situations in their novels that mirror their personal reality. Virginia Woolf included the day in the novel when Vita Sackville-West received *Orlando* in real life, and Ali Smith includes her own research process on Francesco del Cossa by portraying it through the research process of H and George. Smith's quote on how one great narrative is at least two narratives is clearly visible in both novels.[140]

On a final note, their writing techniques show at one point such similarity that it can be interpreted as intertextuality. Byron Randall states on Woolf's technique that she writes using semi-colons between the clauses, "as if allowing for a fortifying intake of breath".[141] In Francescho's part in *How to be both*, Francescho and her father have a conversation about the writing style of her mother - his wife, and they talk about how Francescho has taken over "her

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[136] Ben Davies, 171.
[137] Angeliki Spiropoulou, 113-114.
[138] Jorge Sacido-Romero, 95-96.
[139] Virginia Woolf, 169.
[140] Sarah Lyall, "An Onion of a Novel, Demanding to Be Peeled," *The New York Times*, 25 November, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/26/books/ali-smith-on-her-new-book-how-to-be-both.html.
[141] Byron Randall, 130.

habit of putting these 2 dots between clauses where a breath should come.", in which tradition the whole part of Francescho is thus written, just as certain parts of *Orlando*.[142] This embodies James's and Seshagiri's statement of modernism being a cultural archive for metamodernism, because Francesco's mother living on through Francescho's writing style can be interpreted as an allegory for Virginia Woolf living on in Ali Smith's writing style.

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[142] Ali Smith, 337.

Chapter 3: Crossing the boundaries of gender binarity in *Orlando* and *How to be both*

Besides the reconceptualisation of time in modernist literature, the conventional binarity of gender is also explored in this literary trend; modernism typically explores the boundaries of conventions and the reason behind certain traditions.[143] It explored the possibilities of not confirming to the standard expectations of society. The results of challenging these customs are narratives in which among others gender norms are challenged and in which tradition is set aside. The fluidity of gender is explored in both *Orlando* and *How to be both*. This goes hand in hand with another key feature of modernism, namely a high level of self-reflection.[144] In these two novels the gender of the main characters becomes more fluid through their self-reflection. They analyse their identity thoroughly and question certain assumptions, expectations and supposed boundaries that correspond with their sex. According to Sonya Andermah "the deconstruction or blurring of gender binaries" that Virginia Woolf applies in her novels *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Orlando* can be recognised in contemporary novels written by female authors, among which Ali Smith.[145] Patrick Flannery writes in *The Telegraph* that Smith has followed the advice of Woolf that "one must be woman-manly or man-womanly", by stating this he hints at the blurred boundaries between the sexes apparent in both novels.[146] In Woolf's novel, the protagonist physically changes their sex and in Smith's novel one protagonist conceals herself by pretending to be of the opposite sex. This chapter will analyse how the reconceptualisation of gender binarity is illustrated in *Orlando* and *How to be both*, and in which manner Smith has followed Woolf in this modernist tradition.

Orlando and gender

Already in the first sentence of the novel Orlando's sex is addressed very specifically: "He- for there could be no doubt of his sex."[147] Orlando's biological sex changes during the story, and

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[143] Peter Barry, 79.
[144] Peter Barry, 79.
[145] Sonya Andermah, 251.
[146] Patrick Flannery, "How to be Both by Ali Smith: Brimming With Pain and Joy," *The Telegraph*, October 14, 2014, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/11061768/How-to-Be-Both-by-AliSmith-review-brimming-with-pain-and-joy.html.
[147] Virginia Woolf, 11.

approximately halfway the novel the following is stated: "we have no choice left but confess – he was a woman."[148] Orlando's (gender) identity, however, does not change at all during this transition, this becomes clear from the following sentence: "[b]ut in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been."[149] Woolf did acknowledge the differences between one's sex, one's gender (identity) and one's sexuality in the early twentieth century, and all these elements can be recognised in *Orlando*. Orlando's sexuality is discussed in the novel but this is not defined very specifically, but the acknowledgement of the difference between one's gender, one's sex and one's sexuality, and those three being able to differ from each other, is already a challenge of the conventional binarity of these concepts, and thus clearly suits the rebellious character of modernist literature.

Scholar Karen Kaivola argues that Virginia Woolf transcends the binarity of concepts by stating that people are not merely one thing but a combination, a construct of several layers.[150] Orlando ponders their gender identity after their transition and exclaims the following, in which Woolf transcendence of the binarity of gender is illustrated: "[a]nd here it would seem from some ambiguity in her terms that she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither; and indeed, for the time being, she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman;"[151] Woolf allows in this another option between woman and man, the in-between. This ties in with modernism's character of not settling for a synthesis between conventions, but creating something completely new.[152] Modernist literature refused to build further on the already existing fundaments, but created a new fundament all together. When receiving the binary oppositions man and woman, it is typically modernist to opt for another option: the in-between. This corresponds with Vermeulen's and van den Akker's analysis of the modernist style being "a position without parameters."[153] Further in the novel Woolf elaborates on this, and she suggests that one constructs oneself as a concept: "these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter's hand,"[154] By addressing the self as a concept

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[148] Virginia Woolf, 97.
[149] Virginia Woolf, 98.
[150] Karen Kaivola, "Revisiting Woolf's Representations of Androgyny: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Nations," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 18, 2 (1999), 235.
[151] Virginia Woolf, 113.
[152] Michael Levenson, 5.
[153] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 12.
[154] Virginia Woolf, 213.

in this way is typical for modernism. It illustrates how it is constructed and then deconstructs it with a metaphor pointing out the fragmentation of the self, which seamlessly ties in with Andermah's statement that Woolf literally deconstructs the binarity of gender.[155] It is not only modernist for the fact that it transcends a construct, but also for the manner in which it does so, namely by applying the modernist technique of self-reflection, for the metaphor of a pile of plates is used when Orlando is analysing themselves and their identity. Kaivola notes on Orlando's identity that it "is mobile, not static: presenting not a smooth synthesis of oppositions but a more chaotic hermaphroditic "intermix," (…) Fluid and dynamic,"[156] Woolf thus addresses gender in a very progressive and modernist manner, for she acknowledges both the non-binarity and the dynamic boundaryless aspect of gender and its changeability throughout time.

According to Dudly M. Marchi, Woolf does not only approach gender in the plotline, but also in a textual manner.[157] Virginia Woolf uses language in her novel in such manner it embraces the fluidity of gender. Her use of language thus becomes another argument in favour of limitless concept of gender. Kaivola notes on this that Woolf uses pronouns in such explicit manner that it underlines the fluidity of humans and she implies "that human subjectivity is not reducible to a noncontradictory whole or consistently expressive of the sexed body."[158] In the following passage one recognises a change from using male pronouns to neutral pronouns to the explicit conclusion one must use female pronouns from then on: "Orlando had become a woman – there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. (…) but in the future we must, for convention's sake, say 'her' for 'his', and 'she' for 'he'"[159] Woolf uses this strategy, according to scholar Judith Allen in *Sentencing Orlando: Virginia Woolf and the Morphology of the Modernist Sentence*, "to expose the hybrid and inconclusive qualities of Orlando's genre, the transformative nature of gender, the plurality of identity, and, importantly, Woolf's interrogation of the referentiality of language."[160] The genre Allen hints at is of course

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[155] Sonya Andermah, 251.
[156] Karen Kaivola, 235.
[157] Dudley M. Marchi, 18.
[158] Karen Kaivola, 235.
[159] Virginia Woolf, 98.
[160] Judith Allen, "Orlando and the Politics of (In)Conclusiveness," in *Sentencing Orlando: Virginia Woolf and the Morphology of the Modernist Sentence*, eds. Elsa Högberg and Amy Bromley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 199.

modernism, for all these qualities tie in with the characteristics of fragmentation, fluidity and crossing boundaries within the set conventions.

Besides employing language use to address this fluidity, she employs it as well to address a lack of female representation. Anna Frøsig states that Woolf genders her sentences as female as possible, for a sentence is "already gendered male by default."[161] By doing so "Woolf creates in *Orlando* the androgynous space of indeterminacy between the 'purely' male or female mind where there is room for the 'suggestive power' she finds lacking in masculine prose."[162] An example of this is the passage where Woolf addresses female desires, which was and sometimes still is perceived as quite unconventional, and which is thus often left out in (male) narratives: "[f]or the probity of breeches she exchanged the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally."[163] This exact passage of *Orlando* is used in Sarah French's research, in which she interprets it as a sign of resistance. French compares this thought of Orlando with the thoughts they have on the pressure of society to marry in a heterosexual relationship. French concludes on this comparison that "her [Orlando] self-conscious performance of heteronormative social roles does not impede upon her internal sense of non-normative sexual identity."[164] Woolf thus offers a nuanced image of the pressure of society and its impact on Orlando. Even though Orlando feels they must obey society, they also dare to deviate from the norm. Orlando worries about marrying, but they are not impeded in their thoughts on enjoying love, even though they are a woman and it would not be appreciated in society that a woman thinks of enjoying love and seductiveness. So, although the pressure of society does have an effect on Orlando, it will not stop them from thinking and most of the time acting the way they want.

Woolf's discontent with the role of women in society rings through the whole novel. As Frøsig accordingly states, she tries to establish a foothold in a male dominated world.[165] Using Orlando as a fictional first hand source on the position in women throughout history, Woolf comments on their place and the conventions in society. She also addresses the duality of Orlando the man who had different opinions than Orlando the woman: " 'Now I shall have to

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[161] Anna Frøsig, "'Something intricate and many-chambered': Sexuality and the Embodied Sentence," in *Sentencing Orlando: Virginia Woolf and the Morphology of the Modernist Sentence*, eds. Elsa Högberg and Amy Bromley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 37.
[162] Anna Frøsig, 37.
[163] Virginia Woolf, 153.
[164] Sarah French, *Staging Queer Feminisms* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 2017), 197.
[165] Anna Frøsig, 37.

pay in my own person for those desires,' she reflected; 'for women are not (…) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by natures. They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life, by the most tedious discipline."[166] After Orlando's realisation of their former male privileges they had enjoyed, the comments on the role of women in society become more implicit and cynical. An example of this is when at a certain point in the book Orlando lists their charges, they state: "[t]he chief charges against her were (1) that she was dead, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; (2) that she was a woman, which amounts to much the same thing;"[167] By stating this so bluntly she literally compares being a woman to being dead to society. Another illustration of this is when Woolf describes what has been said to Orlando about their behaviour as a woman, and she adds some cynical notes between brackets: "[l]ove, the poet has said, is woman's whole existence. (…) she [Orlando] will soon give over this pretence of writing and thinking and begin at last to think of a gamekeeper (and as long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking) (…) (and as long as she writes little notes nobody objects to a woman writing either)"[168] Orlando thus does not act as a conventional woman at all, and their doing so can be seen as an act of protest or rebellion against these conventions, just as their free thoughts on seduction and love according to French.[169] Woolf's way of protesting through Orlando, and addressing these inequalities and gender norms explicitly in her novel, corresponds with the statement Neil Lazarus made on modernist literature. According to him modernist literature says "no", it "refuses integration, resolution, consolation, comfort; protests and criticises."[170] Woolf seems to apply this on as much levels as possible in *Orlando*, from her language use and the acts of her protagonist to the refusal of conventions in her plotlines.

Besides these minor cynical comments and the more elaborate passages of Orlando pondering on the construct of gender, another part of the plot can be viewed as a rebellion against patriarchy. Throughout their whole life, Orlando writes a poem 'The Oak Tree', but they only become a published and awarded poet after the transition when Orlando is a woman. Angeliki Sipourpoulou notes on this that although Orlando is an awarded poet, they are not

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[166] Virginia Woolf, 110.
[167] Virginia Woolf, 119.
[168] Virginia Woolf, 187.
[169] Sarah French, 197.
[170] Neil Lazarus, 31.

recognised or considered important irrespective of their status because of their gender. This is thus a paradox in the story, for this first shows a woman can become a published poet, but at the same time her worth is not generally acknowledged. By doing so, Woolf creates a certain social-historical awareness and "[b]y reviewing history through the perspective and the prospects of the woman writer in Orlando, Woolf seems to reinstate the feminine in (literary) history while demonstrating that what is passed on as tradition is ineluctably gendered."[171] Orlando is thus the attribute Woolf uses to gain an overarching perspective which can provide the reader with a historical perspective from one and the same subject. Comparing the past and the present becomes more easy in this way, and seeing the differences between the periods in time and the corresponding conventions creates an awareness among the readers. By doing so Woolf gives the novel an extra political dimension. *Orlando* goes against the status quo and Woolf tries to create awareness on certain conventions in this way.[172] Woolf's interpretation and on these ethical matters and her way of conveying them is a very poignant example of this modernist trait.

<center>*How to be both* and gender</center>

Ali Smith's novel is a diptych which invites us to the world of in-betweens. She explicitly points out inequalities between the sexes and implicitly confronts the reader with their own assumptions. By combining two narratives with different historical perspectives, she explores gender in a transcending manner across time. Carole Jones states in "From Subtext to Gay Text? Scottish Fiction's Queer Communities" that Smith explores "imaginative breaching of the boundaries of existence through her queer narrative".[173] In *How to be both* Smith introduces us to two main characters, George and Francescho. The former is a sixteen-year-old girl who mourns her mother's death and explores her own (sexual) identity, and the latter the ghost of a renaissance artist who changed her public appearance from female to male to be able to work as a painter, and who is now an observer of George's life and reflects on her own life.

The breaching of boundaries at which Jones hints can be seen in the conversations George remembers between her and her mother. George asks "[i]s the artist a woman or a man? Do either of those things matter? her mother says. (…) Male or female? It can't be both. It must

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[171] Angeliki Sipourpoulou, 110-111.
[172] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 93.
[173] Carole Jones, "From Subtext to Gay Text? Scottish Fiction's Queer Communities," in *Community in Modern Scottish Literature*, ed. Scott Lyall (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2016), 195.

be one or the other. Who says? Why must it? her mother says."[174] In conversing with her mother, the conventional boundaries along which George thinks are continuously addressed and questioned. George represents the conventional thoughts and her mother can be viewed as the undermining voice of modernism. George seems to grow in this process, slowly develops in this, and starts asking these questions herself. An illustration of this is when George and her mother are in a museum looking at the painting of Francescho: "[m]ale or female? she says to her mother who's standing under these figures. I don't know, her mother says. (…) Male, female, both, she [her mother] says."[175] Their conversations explicitly address the binarity of gender and the possibilities for other options. It takes the reader by the hand and walks them through the exact steps George and her mother walk through to conclude in the fact it does not matter; the boundaries are arbitrary. This corresponds with Vermeulen and van den Akker who compare metamodernism to a compromise but without boundaries. [176] One could interpret the conversation between George and her mother in the same way, as if it hints at this boundaryless consensus.

In the other part of the novel, Francescho sees George and immediately assumes she is a boy. At a certain point she discovers George is a girl: "[t]his boy is a girl. I knew it. (…) I know cause (…) the boy made, I think, apology, very polite in the unbroken undisguised voice of what can only be a girl."[177] This statement points out the expectations and prejudices Francescho still has of girls, because rationally a certain behaviour can never determine one's sex. Still, this is the reasoning of Francescho in this passage. Not only Francescho thinks along these lines, Sonya Andermah observes that sex is constructed by our cultural context. She argues that: "Smith's denaturalizing of normative gender and her focus on marginalized gender expressions may be seen in terms of what Stryker has called 'transgender feminism'"[178, 179] The way Smith plays with the expectations one has of George's gender, for example by naming her George -a conventional boy's name- but also by letting Francescho first assume she is a boy, creates room for debate. According to Andermah this is one of the characteristics of *How to be both*. She

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[174] Ali Smith, 7-8.
[175] Ali Smith, 51-52.
[176] Timothy Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 12.
[177] Ali Smith, 251.
[178] Susan Stryker, "Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question," in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, ed. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 60.
[179] Sonya Andermah, 253.

argues the novel makes place for the "in-between state".[180] This novel energy, and the aim to move forward is very metamodernist, according to James and Seshagiri.[181]

Although Francescho arguments rather conventionally why George is a girl, she does view naming one's sex and gender as irrelevant. She argues for herself that it does not contribute to her as a person. The moment when her best friend Barto finds out she actually is a woman the following conversation takes place: "[i]s it true? he said. You've been false? All these years? I have never not been true, I said. Me not knowing, he said. You not you. You've known me all along, I said. I've never not been me. You lied, he said. Never, I said. And I have never hidden anything from you."[182] This shows how irrelevant Francescho finds her own sex. She does not have a strong sense of gender identity for there is nothing to tell and correspondingly nothing to hide, according to herself. On her approach to gender Ali Smith states in an interview with *The New York Times*: "You can't be one thing without being, in some ways, the other thing. It's about how to reconcile, how to be tolerant of all the possibilities, to recognize how fine it is to be us and to be in the world."[183] Smith has incorporated this into the novel. Francescho is an example of being two things at the same time, and George's mother can be seen as someone who is open to all possibilities and the in-betweens. The attitude of these characters in the novel represent modernist values of crossing boundaries and the fluidity of concepts in the same way as Peter Barry addresses them in "Beginning Theory and Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory", but also in the way Vermeulen and van den Akker describe the boundaryless middle road.[184, 185] These modernist characteristics have been applied to a twenty-first-century context in George's part of the story, and are therefore clearly in line with James and Seshagiri who address metamodernism as a literary trend inspired by modernism and applied to contemporary literature in a twenty-first-century setting.[186] *How to be both* thus clearly seems to be metamodernist.

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[180] Sonya Andermah, 250.
[181] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 93.
[182] Ali Smith, 278.
[183] Sarah Lyall, "An Onion of a Novel, Demanding to Be Peeled," *The New York Times*, 25 November, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/26/books/ali-smith-on-her-new-book-how-to-be-both.html.
[184] Peter Barry, 78.
[185] Timothy Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 12.
[186] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 87.

The constructiveness of one's true gender becomes apparent during Francescho's 'transition'. When Francescho's father introduces the idea to Francescho of her going to school he presents it as if there is only one obstacle they need to take:

> [m]aybe. If you were to stop wearing these too-big clothes and were to wear, let's say, these boys' clothes instead. And maybe if we allow ourself a bit of imagining. And maybe if we have a bit of discretion. (…) Then we might find someone to train you up. (…) But you'll have to wear your borthers' clothes, he said. And you might, if I find you a training, best be, or become, one of them. Your brothers.[187]

In this passage the deconstruction of gender that Sonya Andermah addresses is portrayed. She first saw it in Woolf's work but recognised it again in among others Smith's literary work.[188] The novels are thus linked concerning this theme. This passage illustrates both the inequality between the gender, but also the simplicity in which one can 'become' the opposite gender; how easily one fits into the set construct. Her father even explicitly states: "nobody will take you for such a training wearing the clothes of a woman", completely reducing the gender inequality to the clothes one wears, while he actually says she is never enough and will never be taken seriously being born as a woman.[189] Whilst he introduces it as a change of clothes, Francescho's identity is soon fully constructed and she completely needs to change. During her career as an artist, she is still disadvantaged due to her sex. She will never earn more money, for the simple fact "[t]hat he [her boss] likes the boys. Not the girls."[190] Francescho's narrative illustrates the inequality and at the same time the manufacturability of gender, addressing its constructed arbitrariness and unfairness.

Smith gives an insight into the gender inequality in society, and the mental insignificance of boundaries between the sexes by depicting whole thoughts, and conversations between the characters in the novel in the modernist technique of stream-of-consciousness.[191] Often, in a humorous but cynical manner, she portrays the debate on the concept of gender. An example of

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[187] Ali Smith, 216-217.
[188] Sonya Andermah, 251.
[189] Ali Smith, 218.
[190] Ali Smith, 319.
[191] Peter Barry, 82.

this is when George's father uses the word Miss, his wife corrects him: "*Ms* Moan, her mother says. Pardon my world-stopping act of political incorrectness, her father says. (…) I prefer Miss, George says. Till I'm, you know, Doctor Moan. Too young to know the political importance of choosing to be called Ms anything, her mother says."[192] Andermah states on this perspective that "Smith's text produces a rich layering of embodied experience that is both woman-centered in the mother–daughter episodes but also records the transgendered experience of the artist in a particular historical context."[193] By stating this, Andermah makes clear that *How to be both* is political on several levels. It is part of transgender feminism and emphasises both the female perspective on life, but also the non-binary or transgender perspective and aspects of life.[194] By doing so it is a very inclusive narrative, but also actively gives a voice to people who often are forced to live in the margins. This can be seen as a way of protesting, which is a common trait in modernism, according to Neil Lazarus.[195] Modernist literature is often political in its multi-layeredness and it goes against the set conventions. Smith's take on this, and Andermah's interpretation of this, illustrate this poignantly. According to James and Seshagiri it is even recognisable as one of the typical features of metamodernism as well.[196]

Gender is not introduced as explicitly on the first page of *How to be both* as it is in *Orlando*, but that does not mean it is not an equally important theme in the novel. Ali Smith and Virginia Woolf both made an effort to challenge the concept of gender and the corresponding themes of sex, inequality and sexuality. Both writers provide a narrative in which one can find reconceptualisations of gender in the plotlines, but also more implicitly in the use of language, the self-reflection of the protagonists, and in the dialogues between the characters.

The novels address the view of gender being a construct. In both texts a transition takes place which does not change one's behaviour or true identity; merely one's place in society. Orlando changes their biological sex, but does not change as a person all together. Therefore, Orlando does not feel the urge to behave any differently from what they did before. This, however, is perceived differently in society, for Orlando has less privileges as a woman than as a

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[192] Ali Smith, 18-19.
[193] Sonya Andermah, 257.
[194] Susan Stryker, 60.
[195] Neil Lazarus, 31.
[196] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 97.

man. Francescho does not biologically change her sex, but she, or at least her father, is aware of the position of women in society and they decide to use this knowledge in their favour. Francescho disguises herself and pretends to be a man to receive an education and a job as a painter, for being a man is favourable in society. When comparing these examples of the analyses it results in a paradox. Both Orlando and Francescho do not seem to mind being male or female. They emphasise that they have always been themselves, as they are the same regardless of their gender. The view of society on their gender is, however, opposed to their own ideas. Their position in society changes completely based on only that aspect of their characters: their gender.

An illustration of how arbitrary these gender concepts are is visible in both novels. The modernist techniques do their job and enlight this in several ways. Both novels contain passages in which behaving as a woman or as a man is compared to acting. In *How to be both* H tells a story to George with an actress involved, and H says: "[t]he girl playing Rosalind had this habit of getting into her Ganymede character by walking about behind the audience pretending to be a girl then pretending to be a boy to get her stance right, (…) Anyway she was walking up and down and up and down in the half-dark pretending to be one and then the other".[197] This is a quite literal allegory for how easily one can 'change' into the opposite sex. In *Orlando* a same example can be found when the protagonist meets the Archduchess – who appears to be a man instead of a woman: "[i]n short, they acted the parts of man and woman for ten minutes with great vigour and then fell into natural discourse."[198] Both examples illustrate how a person's role in society is completely determined by nurture, and one's nature has nothing to do with it.

Considering the use of language Smith spends ample time on dialogues which show the relativity of language and how much room there is for interpretation. Woolf, on the other hand, depicts it somewhat more as an established form and addresses the change of using pronouns for example very directly. Smith is less explicit in this.

Another similarity between the novels, in which Smith perhaps has looked at Woolf and felt inspired, is the manner in which both Orlando and Francescho visit prostitutes to discover themselves. In both novels the brothels are displayed as a safe haven in which the protagonists can be utterly themselves, regardless of their sex, gender or sexuality. Both experience sexual

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[197] Ali Smith, 146-147.
[198] Virginia Woolf, 126.

pleasure here and discover a new side of themselves and extra meaning of their identity and sexuality. Smith adds an extra aspect to the theme of sexual pleasure and orientation by the plotline of George who watches a rather brutal porn video over and over again to be an ally of the girl in the video. George experiences the opposite of Orlando and Francescho and feels repulsed by sex. As if Smith felt inspired by Woolf's narrative involving brothels, but at the same time felt the urge to add a twenty-first-century perspective to the theme of sex and sexuality.

Anna Frøsig argues that *Orlando*'s "play with metaphor and synecdoche in particular destabilises the boundaries between identity and otherness, body and mind, and questions both the ontological and ethical adequacy of simple gender binaries."[199] Woolf's take on this is highly modernist, for it is political, fragmented and addresses fluidity. One can possibly argue exactly the same for what Smith has done in her novel *How to be both* only then set in the twenty-first-century, making it a contemporary take on modernism: metamodernist.

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[199] Anna Frøsig, 32-33.

Conclusion

Orlando and *How to be both* are written a little less than one hundred years apart from each other, and still they have many similarities regarding the genre, the style in which they are written and the themes they discuss. Smith and Woolf did not live in the same period of time, but it seems as if they did share the same Zeitgeist concerning their literary works. They both were not afraid to challenge the status quo or to be unique in their writing forms; Woolf using a striking scope and Smith employing a rather distinctive printing style. Regardless of their similarities, both novels clearly have their own character, fitting for the period in which they are written. By means of placing the close readings of *Orlando* and *How to be both* in the context of the debate on the resurfacing of modernism as metamodernism, this thesis researches if Ali Smith has used Woolf's *Orlando* as a cultural archive from which she gathered inspiration and modernist elements to use in her own twenty-first-century novel *How to be both*, and if the latter can thus be perceived as metamodern according to the definition of James and Seshagiri.

      First an outline of the contemporary debate on the resurfacing of modernism was needed for the following literary analyses of the novels. In this outline it becomes clear modernism is re-identified in its new context at the beginning of the twenty-first-century. Two studies mainly stood out in this landscape of new theories, namely "Notes on metamodernism" by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, and "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution" by David James and Urmila Seshagiri. Although the former does offer certain insights concerning the transcending of conventional concepts and the broader interpretation of metamodernism as a contemporary art trend, the latter offers a more suitable theoretical framework for this thesis because it sets a clear foundation on which the comparison between the two novels can be based. James and Seshagiri offer a theoretical structure in which metamodernism reaches back to modernism. They do this, however, without taking postmodernism into account. This is a flaw in the used theoretical framework. It cannot be assumed that the previous literary trend has had no influence on *How to be both* whatsoever, which James and Seshagiri do suggest by omitting postmodernism in their theory. Modernism and postmodernism have many similarities and can therefore not be perceived as two absolute literary trends, because postmodernism is the extension of modernism. *How to be both* contains

postmodern elements, as Nick Lavery states on this: "[t]he authors' [Smith's] engagement with Modernist forms and ideas complements their willingness to attempt to depict the subjective experience of consciousness. It is also complemented by their maintaining of a Postmodern view of the self as determined partly by the operations of institutional power and culture."[200] The postmodern view that Smith has incorporated in her novel can be recognised in the use of irony and her pragmatics. Regarding this aspect a research that acknowledges the postmodern influence would complement the chosen theoretical framework. For example, the research of Vermeulen and van den Akker, they state on metamodernism that it is a "discourse, oscillating between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony", or the essay of Wit Pietrzak who states metamodernism has modernist playfulness in combination with postmodern seriousness.[201, 202] The theoretical framework thus has its deficiencies, because it does not cover the postmodern aspects of the contemporary metamodern novels. By ignoring this postmodern influence the made analysis cannot be regarded as a complete. The structure offered by the research of James and Seshagiri is still very suitable for this thesis, because of the main aim to determine if *How to be both* is directly in line with *Orlando*. Moreover, James and Seshagiri have as focal point metamodern literature which makes it a more fitting theory than, for example, Vermeulen and van den Akker who do not address literature at all.

Chapter two analysed the way in which the novels crossed boundaries in relation to the concept of time. Both writers employ different techniques to transcend the linearity of time. They blur these boundaries between the past, the present and the future by utilising memories. In both novels these memories are described in such a manner that they are not separable from the physical experiences the characters have, and therefore the memories of the past weigh as heavy as the contemporary events. When comparing the different analyses it can be concluded that the combination of this specific content shaped in this specific literary style blurs the lines of the past and the present in such way it almost becomes tenseless for the tenses become more fluid.[203] This goes hand in hand with the high level of interconnectedness that is addressed in the novels. Both George's mother and Orlando argue nothing is merely one thing, and everything has several layers. So, modernism emphasises that although something happened in the past, this

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[200] Nick Lavery, 764-765.
[201] Timothy Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 1.
[202] Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers, "Introduction: Metamodernism," *English Studies* 99, 7 (2018), 721.
[203] Ben Davies, 171.

does not mean it has no influence anymore today, or that it has stopped happening all together. Another aspect both literary works contain is the role of a protagonist as a bridge between eras. Ali Smith uses the ghost of the renaissance painter Francescho to comment on the contemporary era, and Virginia Woolf comments through Orlando on the (cultural) conditions of the centuries through which Orlando lives. Utilising a character in such way creates the view of an omniscient narrator with still a certain subjectivity captured in it. Lastly, art is also used as an object travelling through time; it remains longer than the creator and it takes on both the meaning of the time it was made and the meaning the spectator assigns to it, creating a double temporality to one object.

Chapter three contained an analysis of the transcendence of the binarity of gender, which can be recognised in both novels. *Orlando* and *How to be both* contain characters who challenge their sex and even transition during the novel. By taking the reader by the hand and letting them follow the journey of the protagonists' transitions, both writers deliberately show how gender is constructed by society. Woolf and Smith both portray a person who changes their (perceived) sex, and they underline how nothing regarding these characters as individual personalities changes. They take room for contemplations about being something in between the binary options, about not knowing how to identify and about all the expectations and prejudices corresponding to ones gender. Both novels go against conventions by not only illustrating examples of people who transcend the gender binaries, but also by actively comment on the inequalities between the genders and on the patriarchy. It can be concluded from the synthesis of both analyses that besides the explicit commentary and the plotlines defending gender equality, both writers use their language in such way the concept of gender seems more fluid. An example of this is the explicit way Woolf addresses the use of pronouns with a certain disinterest because Orlando as a character stayed the same, but society asks for a change in language. Smith plays with the expectation of the reader by carefully choosing her words, naming a girl George, which is a rather masculine name, but also by letting Francescho believe George is a boy in the beginning. Both challenge the conventional ideas on gender, societal reactions to gender and the readers expectations on gender. Woolf and Smith use the stream of consciousness technique to do this and add many elements of self-reflection to it. These self-reflectory elements are stimulated by the voice of the biographer in *Orlando* and the conversations between George and

her mother in *How to be both*. This results in two highly modernist novels that conclude in many ways that gender is a construct.

The poignant combination between the form and content, which Smith and Woolf both clearly know how to employ, is an overarching technique they use to create an in-between context. When comparing the tenseless tense they created as shown in chapter two, with the indifference of gender for one's individual character as portrayed in chapter three, it can be concluded that the perfect match between form and content lies at the strength of both novels. In this overarching technique the writers meet, and their works are thus clearly in line with each other. The goal of blurring the boundaries of these concepts is achieved by employing modernist traits such as the stream of consciousness technique, the self-reflectory elements considering both the protagonists as the narratives themselves, and the original manner in which language is used. Woolf and Smith address the constructedness of concepts and followingly transcend the constructs, by offering new possibilities such as the in-between, or by deconstructing the concept all together.

Considering James' and Seshagiri's statement that metamodernism deliberately looks at the customs of twenty-century modernism, but that it does not merely copy but actively uses elements such as its energy and aspirations to move further, it can be concluded that Ali Smith's *How to be both* is in line with this. [204] The research presented in this thesis suggests that Smith has looked at *Orlando* and felt inspired. When analysing if *How to be both* is in line with *Orlando* one must admit they share a lot of similarities. When comparing the elements that resulted from the analyses in chapter two and three, one sees they both clearly contain the main themes of gender and time, but also share elements such has homosexuality, brothels and loss. All depicted in their modernist techniques, containing self-reflection, irony and unique pragmatics. James and Seshagiri defined metamodernism as follows: "Metamodernism regards modernism as an era, an aesthetic, and an archive that originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."[205] Smith's novel is similar to Woolf's concerning the blurring of boundaries, the aim to go further and the rebellious and critical attitude towards set conventions and the status quo. The manner in which Smith then incorporated it in the twenty-first-century

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[204] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 93.
[205] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 88.

with a complete different narrative is in line with James and Seshagiri's definition and conclusion that metamodern literature is a result of looking back into the cultural archive of modernism, taking crucial aspects of this trend and applying it to a new narrative in a contemporary twenty-first-century context.[206] The way Ali Smith shaped her novel *How to be both* using modernist traits in a twenty-first-century context is extremely close to how Virginia Woolf shaped *Orlando* in the early twentieth century. Both Smith and Woolf use the modernist traits such as irony or political implications when depicting thoughts, memories and conversations. Due to these techniques and the style in which the novels are written *How to be both* and *Orlando* breathe modernism in the same manner. It is sometimes even that similar that one can assume intertextuality. It can thus be concluded that in the analysis of *How to be both* it became apparent that the modernist characteristics of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* are clearly incorporated in Ali Smith's novel, which makes it a metamodernist literary work according to the theory of David James and Urmila Seshagiri.

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[206] David James and Urmila Seshagiri, 88.

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