György Kalmár

Subversive Bodily and Textual Practices in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*[1]

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* seems to evade those well-established methods of criticism that apparently work well in the case of Woolf's other novels. Nothing indicates this better than the fact that many critics neglect this novel in their works covering Woolf's oeuvre (amongst them such noted Woolf scholars as Mitchell A. Leaska in his *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, or John Batchelor in his *Virginia Woolf: The Major Novels*). Many of those who finally undertake analysing it – David Dowling, Howard Harper, or Makiko Minow-Pinkey for example – basically fail to step out of the analytical framework of modernism, which often prevents them from taking notice of such characteristics of the novel as its strong narrative drive, the importance of metafiction, its parody of different styles and discourses, not to mention the particular interrelations of love, desire and disseminative writing.

My starting point in the following analysis of *Orlando* comes from Julia Kristeva and Nóra Séllei, who point out that theories of textuality and narrative tend to be inextricably intertwined with theories of subjectivity (Kristeva 124; Séllei, "A nő mint szubjektum" 10). These theories, I would argue, usually manifest themselves as practices of writing and being, that is, as specific ways of organising intertwined systems of textuality and subjectivity. Therefore, my aim is to relate the novel's narrative-rhetorical characteristics to theories and practices of subjectivity. I will try to demonstrate that *Orlando* is an odd one out in Woolf's oeuvre, a text that not only works differently, but one that is inspired, fuelled and shaped by another experience of subjectivity. *Orlando* is a novel in which the 'typical' questions that criticism approaches Woolf's texts with (like narrative technique, time, gender, subjectivity, art, history and politics) are inscribed in a different, yet no less exciting or subversive way. Similarly to Séllei, who contends that Woolf's later writings require an analytical framework slightly different from the one established on basis of the 'great' novels of the 1920s (Séllei, *A másik Woolf*), I will argue that *Orlando* follows a different paradigm and therefore demands a different analytical approach. I will argue that this 'other Woolf' that criticism often avoided without any explanation, and Woof herself also repudiated later, is at least as radical and productive from both a theoretical and a political point of view as the more characteristically modernist one.

I wish to argue that, when read with feminist and/or post-structuralist theories of desire and the body, *Orlando* shows its subversive and disseminative potentials. This

[1] The present article is an abbreviated, slightly rewritten version of "Parler-Entre-Elles: Possibilities of a Less Phallocentric Symbolic Economy in Virginia Woolf's Orlando." *The AnaChronist*, 16 (Winter 2011): 57–79. ISSN 1219–2589. DOI: https://doi.org/10.53720/MSKG9805 Reprinted here with the kind permission of *The AnaChronist*.

disseminative activity is closely connected to certain narrative characteristics, its deconstructive rhetoric, and the role the body and eroticism play in the production of meaning and subjectivity. *Orlando* is a pleasurable read in which the body becomes a central site, source, inspiration, and medium of meaning. I will indicate how *Orlando* creates a textual and libidinal economy that is different from the typical patterns of both modernism and phallogocentric systems of meaning in general (Booker 182). Relying on some feminist interpretations of Lacan, I will argue (contra Lacan) that *Orlando* proves that the field of meaning is not necessarily exclusively that of castration and lack, but may also be something considerably different, more joyful, something similar to what Derrida in *Writing and Difference* characterised as "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of the world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin..." (Derrida 292).

The pleasure of the text

In order to understand the playful joys of *Orlando*, and the ways pleasure may turn into an organising (or, at times, disorganising) principle, it might be helpful to refer to the distinction that Roland Barthes makes between texts of bliss and texts of pleasure:

> Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language. (Barthes 14)

I would argue that, while most of Woolf's writings are texts of bliss (and, what is more, they are exactly the kind of texts of modernism that gave birth to these categories, that made critics distinguish between worthy and enjoyable texts), *Orlando* may be seen either be a text of pleasure or (in a more radical reading) one as one deconstructive of Barthes's dichotomy. At first glance, *Orlando* is an example of texts of pleasure. But if one takes a closer look and examines its rhetoric and figurativity, one may realise that in *Orlando* the 'logic' of texts of pleasure is taken to its ultimate point, creating a playful and subversive symbolic system driven by pleasure, love and desire. *Orlando* offers a textual and libidinal economy different from the 'proper' norms of phallogocentism. It not only tolerates, but also notoriously accumulates logical contradictions, creating a discourse in which difference works in other ways than in (what Derrida and Irigaray call the) economies of the proper. The text constantly confuses basic dichotomies of the (patriarchal) symbolic and disregards such axioms of it as the unity of the self, the unity and univocal nature of sexual identity, and the ability of the narrator to exercise mastery over the text. In other words, while the novel may appear to please and entertain us without really challenging the existing order (like texts of pleasure), it actually takes the reader away from the properly castrated (that is, from what is castrated by the order of the *proper*).

Orlando is not only fuelled by pleasure, but also by libidinal energies and desire (the desires of narrative, the body and the unconscious), and also that of a different kind of subjectivity. This is the basic set of notions which should open new spaces for the novel's meanings. According to Barthes, in the pleasure of the text, the (patriarchal) Law becomes a more flexible playfield, and the body (together with the drives connected to it) can join discourse. The reader is simply *lost* in the pleasurable text, one loses oneself in it. This seems to make sense from a psychoanalytical perspective in which it is only intensive joy or pain that can loosen the grip of the symbolic: in *Orlando*, the mixing of the reader and the text (which is the crucial act of the birth of this kind of aesthetic experience) happens through intensive pleasure. Thus, the pleasure of the text is also an erotic pleasure as it stems from the pleasure of union, the union of the text, the reader and his/her (repressed) other. As Peter Brooks remarks, satisfaction is a "surrender to otherness" (Brooks 9), where the reading self surrenders to the otherness of the text and (at least partly) to the formless inner otherness that is normally covered by the coherent (castrated) subject. This surrender to the other, this loss of the self is the satisfaction caused by and felt in the pleasure of the text.

It may very well be the case that *Orlando* reveals something that many post-structuralist theoreticians forget. I would argue that *Orlando* and Barthes know something about the flexibility and openness of both meaning and subjectivity that Lacan does not seem to: that we like to play, and that when we are absorbed in joyful play we feel and *are* different. The game we play refigures the symbolic for a time together with the subject. It is an ironic characteristic of psychoanalytical theory that while it presents a de-centered, split subject, it also conceptualises the symbolic order, the field of meaning in which that subjectivity takes shape as (almost completely) unified and (potentially) trans-historical. Texts like *Orlando* may point out that the field of meaning and the subject may be much more flexible, open and shifting than mainstream accounts of psychoanalytic theory usually describe it.

Let us see how the game this text plays rewrites certain elements and mechanisms of phallogocentric systems of meaning. Perhaps it is best to start with the most obvious one, the problem of gender identity. What may strike the reader first is that Orlando does not seem to have the coherent, unchanging, 'proper' identity that 'normal' people (or characters) have. "When you meet someone, the first distinction you make is 'male or female?' and you are accustomed to make this distinction with unhesitating certainty" – says Freud in his (in)famous lecture on femininity (Freud 146). Yet, Orlando's gender identity – or, more exactly, the naturalness of 'his' gender identity – is questioned by the very first sentence of the novel: "He – for there could be no doubt about his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it – was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters" (Woolf 11). As Booker correctly notes, "this declaration of Orlando's gender is highly ironic: there is in fact a great deal of doubt about his sex, and the entire fabric of the text is permeated with images of ambiguous gender" (Brooker 182). In other words, by affirming something – Orlando's gender

identity – that should be obvious and natural, the text brings it into question and destabilises its very naturalness. The gender identity of Orlando and the duality of his identity and appearance become an open question from the very first sentence of the novel, an obscure place in the signifying process in which desire can be born. The text does not say that it could not be known whether Orlando was a boy or a girl, but creates a world in which these concepts need explanations, words, descriptions, focussing an erotically charged attention on the body. In this way, *Orlando* does not simply subvert the patriarchal symbolic order (of "unhesitating certainty") thematically, but also teaches the reader to think in terms of a language which is different from the Oedipal order.

The strong narrative drive, one of the most important characteristics of texts of pleasure, is also typical of *Orlando*, which never frustrates its reader, but always remains enjoyable, understandable and seductive, constantly feeding and teasing the reader's epistemophilia and scopophilia. Through these pleasures, the reader becomes erotically invested in a text that French feminist writers would call a piece of *écriture féminine*, a text that diverges from the patriarchal symbolic in both the imaginary and symbolic registers. In Moi's description,

> It is a writing which finds its source and character in the half-repressed libidinal drives of the girl child for the mother. . . . Not only is such a writing essentially different from male writing, it is also a de-cerebralised writing, which takes its energies from the sexual pleasures of the body. The phrase that recurs as a near synonym of *écriture féminine* is the phrase 'writing the body'. . . . To 'write the body' is to seek to recover the inhabited, repressed, forgotten, lost desire for the mother and the mother's body, which the Symbolic Order of language has superseded. (6)

In my opinion, the most radical potential of the concept of *écriture féminine*, just like Derrida's concept of writing, is that these are theories of difference *within* the field of meaning: these concepts are capable of rewriting Lacan's binary system in which meaning, symbolic economies and subjectivity are always necessarily connected to being subjected to Oedipalisation, castration, lack, and the phallus, while everything outside this (unhappy, phallocentric) system are also placed outside meaning and subjectivity in general (and associated with fantasy or psychoses). I argue that *Orlando* calls attention to the theoretical necessity that one replaces this inside/outside model with one that is able to account for a variety of different economies of meaning and different subjectivities.

Desire and the text

What can be known about the birth of *Orlando* (from the con-*text*, texts written by Woolf, contemporaries, critics, and biographers) seems to suit well the ideas of pleasurable loss in a different order of meaning outlined above. What is more, the way the text and its con-text relate to each other in the case of *Orlando* may deconstruct our ('proper') ideas about the (theoretically) distinct categories of author, implied author and narrator.

Woolf started writing *Orlando* in the winter of 1927, when Vita (Victoria Sackville-West), who is usually referred to as her greatest love, went travelling with her husband. That is the reason why Nigel Nicolson could call the novel "the longest and most charming love letter in literature" (Knopp 111). So on one hand the text is a love letter, a piece of writing between two women in love, *parler-entre-elles,* as Irigaray would call it, a text written in the specific feminine language of the couple (Whitford 199); but, on the other hand, it is also a substitute for the lacking object of desire. One could say that Woolf wrote *Orlando* (for herself) because of the lack of Vita, as a surrogate.[2] In this case, the novel is a metaphor or textual displacement of the object of desire: the body of the text is analogous to the body of the loved one. Naming, telling, narrating something in this sense also means possessing it: telling (the story of) the object of desire means having that object (Brooks 19–20). Obviously, this may be one of the sources of the pervasive pleasures of the novel, pleasures that spread easily from the narrator to the reader.

The crucial point to see here is that these are not 'just' metaphors of love, just like these pleasures are not bookish or dry at all. The object's being made up of figures of speech does not differ much from 'ordinary' situations of love: according to post-structuralist theoreticians of love and desire like Lacan or Catherine Belsey, these feelings are very much based on seeing the object through certain kinds of figures of speech (Belsey 34). In the Lacanian sense, there is no language without desire (to tell, to know, to be recognised by the other), just as there is no desire without language. As Lacan's analysis of courtly love aptly demonstrates in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, distance and figurativity only increase desire, as they delay its fulfilment, so much so that courtly love may be called a "poetic exercise" (148).

In other words, *Orlando* shows, displays, focuses on Orlando's body, but this appearance of presence through words and figures of speech talks about the absence of the original object, which is the precondition of desire in the first place. This paradoxical situation amounts to saying that an object of desire is always present and absent, always bodily and figurative, whether encountered in a book or in bed.

This way the novel also stages the acts of desire, 'knowing,' and the constant refiguring of subjectivity by desire, and desire by language. As the sight of the naked body is often less erotic than the gap between two pieces of clothes (to use Barthes's example), the game of concealing and revealing also becomes more exciting and pleasurable than showing the object in its 'nakedness' would be. It also has to be noted that according to psychoanalysis the ultimate object of desire can never be shown: it is unnameable and terrifying at the same time. The original object shown in itself is a Medusa head, which can be watched only in the mirror of one's shield, as Perseus did. This prohibition, and the necessity that the text be something that shields, mirrors, and refigures at the same time, defines the basic semantic and rhetorical strategies of the novel. Another reason why

[2] For a detailed analysis of the connection between self-therapy, writing and autobiography in Woolf, see: Nóra Séllei "Az önéletírás (lehetetlensége)".

nudity is less exciting than the game that constantly conceals and reveals its *objet petit a*, as Lacan calls it, is that nudity may cut short fantasy and figurative meaning, the things that can transform the object into (the illusion of) the original object of desire.

The diary entries and letters of Woolf may also indicate how closely connected *Orlando* is to love and pleasure: "I am so engulfed in *Orlando* I can think of nothing else. . . . I make it up in bed at night, as I walk the streets, everywhere. I want to see you in the lamplight, in your emeralds. In fact I have never more wanted to see you than I do now" (Knopp 112). It seems that the textualisation of desire liberates both the narrative and desire. Sexual and textual desires transform into each other. The strength of narration, the vigorous style of the work, the love of words and the unmistakable joy of the (implied) writer in her work all seem to come from this eroticism. This liberation and textualisation of her desires was as sudden a turn for (the implied) Woolf as strong the previous repression was: "[*Orlando* was] extraordinary unwilled by me but potent in its own right ... as if it shoved everything aside to come into existence" (Knopp 115). All these words are very telling: *Orlando* was not intended by Woolf, and one can emphasise either the word "unwilled" here, as Woolf *did not intend it*, or the words "by me," as *it was not Woolf* who intended the birth of the work (but an internal *other*).

The way Woolf comments on her work is not any less telling. She often calls it a joke, a farce, a writer's holiday or an escapade (Minow-Pinkey 118). These expressions and the fact that she later disavowed her work emphasise the novel's difference from the rest of the oeuvre. Calling *Orlando* a joke is telling not only because it means that the novel is different, but also because such an underestimation of the work can also be read as a defensive technique to distance the text's pleasures from the subject who feels threatened by them. At the same time this underestimation sets the text free from the critical eye of the Law: the jester's cap may serve as defence, and may open spaces for a different (and more pleasurable) economy of writing.

Metonymic speech and the body

From the perspective of the above theoretical considerations, *Orlando* appears like a highly eroticised text where (in the constitutive distance from the phallus) the imaginary, the unconscious, and the drives of the body take unusually active parts in producing joyful, disseminative writing. It may be fruitful to recall at this point that Barthes's favourite metaphor in the description of the pleasure of the text is also the eroticised body:

> Is not the most erotic portion of the body *where the garment gapes?* ... it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance. (Barthes 9–10)

One may perceive a very similar economy of pleasure, seeing, and knowledge in *Orlando*: the play of showing and concealing the object of desire and/or knowledge is a recurrent strategy (for example in the descriptions of Orlando or the Russian princess), but this strategy also seems to regulate the relationship of the Law and the subject of pleasure, or the economy of knowledge and uncertainty. That is the reason why omission becomes one of the most important rhetorical vehicles of the novel: the reader often does not get fully satisfying descriptions, explanations, or motivations of characters of the kind (that realism made us grow accustomed to). Consequently, *Orlando* creates the impression that there is nothing like ultimate truth, psychological coherence, or a deep essential logic behind events. The same may be said about the erotic parts: it is not only in the more intimate scenes that the narrator cuts away, but she also avoids the overtly erotic parts in the (frequent) descriptions of Orlando's body.

One of the most conspicuous poetic vehicles of the text is in close connection with this. In the subtly eroticised text of *Orlando*, the object of desire is something highly rhetorical and figurative. We never see private parts or the ultimate truth in its 'nakedness': things are always covered, displaced, substituted by deceptive figurations. The text, in a radically anti-essentialist manner, keeps talking about Orlando's *body* instead of him/her. However, Orlando's body is not shown naked either; the most often used metonymy (or synecdoche) of his/her body is that of the legs, which appear many times and often play important roles in the story. Sometimes, however, the text does not stop even here, but talks about desire through another metonymy – Orlando's clothes. This is another sense in which the novel establishes the discourse of the body: the signs of the novel are written on the bodies of the characters. In other words, the text (dis-)places the object of desire (and knowledge together with it) in a series of substitutions, displacements, metaphors and metonymies.

The scene when Orlando meets Queen Elizabeth may be a fine example. In the discourse of the body in general, and here as well, the spectacle is of prime importance, as the desired body is put on stage in the field of vision. The importance of the sight of the body and the logic of metonymy are spectacularly connected here:

> Such was his [Orlando's] shyness that he saw no more of her [the Queen] than her ringed hand in water; but it was enough. It was a memorable hand; a thin hand with long fingers always curling as if round orb or sceptre; a nervous, crabbed, sickly hand; a commanding hand, too; a hand that had only to raise itself for a head to fall; a hand, he guessed, attached to an old body that smelt like a cupboard in which furs are kept in camphor; which body was yet caparisoned in all sorts of brocades and gems; and held itself very upright though perhaps in pain from sciatica; and never flinched though strung together by a thousand fears; and the Queen's eyes were light yellow. (Woolf 16–17).

The passage illustrates perfectly how the body speaks in the novel. Basically, it uses metonymies, and, with the help of synecdoches, it shows the whole in the part. If one is to believe Freud and Barthes, behind this characteristic of the discourse of the body one finds the prohibition of showing the whole and the naked: revealing the ultimate object of desire is not only a blasphemy, a taboo, but more importantly an essentialist gesture of someone (like Nietzsche's "dogmatic philosopher" in *Beyond Good and Evil*) who does not know anything about woman or knowing. Such a clumsy (essentialist, dogmatic, metaphysical) gesture could no doubt extinguish desire. It is also interesting in the above passage that even death is signified by a synecdoche from the field of the body, when, instead of an execution, it mentions the fall of a head.

One might ask why the representation of the Queen is saturated by this high extent of rhetoricity and figuration, why the signifying chain is extended to such a length by the metonymies of the body. The Queen is not the object of desire for Orlando, or for the narrator. I think it is exactly this characteristic of the text that should call our attention to the importance of the Queen's character. The Queen as a symbol may signify the great mother (of life), the starting-point of all life and things, power, wisdom, and the *phallus*. She is the one who donates lands to Orlando, to her favourite, in a sense she is the one who sets the story off. She is the ancestress and the donor of Orlando's story, and, as there is not much about Orlando's mother in the novel, she also fulfils that function. In other words, it is the main character of the imaginary that the reader meets here, the (pre-oedipal, 'phallic') mother. The attention paid to her hand may also suggest that the figure of the Queen may also represent the Writer: she is the origin of the story, she loves Orlando, and decides in questions of life and death by a move of her fingers. This is the reason why the Queen cannot be glimpsed, why she cannot be touched and why all the vehicles of rhetoric are there: her immediate presence would stop words and signification, her sight would freeze the narrative.

The discourse of the body has another feature that may be relevant in this context. According to French feminist thinkers, the body (and its drives) can be a place of resistance to the symbolic order. It may resist the 'proper' places and meanings prescribed for it, it differs from them, always threatens with transgression, and keeps producing a surplus of (semiotic) meaning that cannot be integrated into the symbolic. As Brooks argues, the body "often presents us with a fall from language, a return to an infantile pre-symbolic space in which primal drives reassert their force. Yet the earliest infantile experiences . . . may be foundational of all symbolism" (7).

This is where the body as the place of subverting the symbolic meets the body as the foundation of symbolism. In the child's world, the main analogy for the understanding of experience is the body. That is the reason why the language of returning to the pre-oedipal world of the girl child can also be described as the language of the body. Therefore, this textual strategy may be regarded as a return not only to the early stages of the psyche but also to one of the early stages of language. Language was partly built of the

body, when it was built on it to hide it. And, as the mother is ever present behind language, as source, inspiration and something to conceal, so is the body:

> the body furnishes the building blocks of symbolisation, and eventually of language itself, which then takes us away from the body, but always in a tension that reminds us that mind and language need to recover the body as an otherness that is somehow primary to their very definition. . . . . the body as at once a cultural construct and its other, something outside of language that language struggles to mark and to be embodied in. (Brooks xii–xiii)

As the Woolf passage quoted above may indicate, the basic trope of the discourse of the body is metonymy. Of the two basic psychical mechanisms of the unconscious in Freudian psychoanalysis – condensation and displacement –, it can be connected to the latter, which Lacan explicitly connects to the way desire works (*Écrits* 176). The main idea of displacement – like that of a metonymy – is to transfer a thing's meaning to another in close connection with it, and to conceal the first thing by this. It is also important that there is no hierarchical relation between the two things; the old and the new signifiers (unlike in the case of a metaphor or condensation) are both on the same level. "Little Hans" in Freud's famous case-study uses a metonymy when he transfers his hatred and fear of his father – that he feels in the street when walking with him – to the horses he sees there almost in the same way as Woolf does when talking about Orlando's stockings instead of talking about his/her body. In the first case, as in Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past," it is rather trauma and anxiety that drive the signifying chain forward (Séllei, "Az önéletírás" 82), while, in the second, it is desire.

If a text is metonymic, one of the first things that may call one's attention to this fact is the lack of hierarchical relationships. The individual episodes cannot be connected to anything common floating somewhere above them as an omniscient perspective, it is not inner affinity that connects them, but rather their succession in time, or the presence of the main character('s body). These texts do not have any parts standing above or structuring the others, like the last two lines of the Shakespearean sonnet or the final outcome of the *Bildungsroman*. Of course, this brings about the freedom and playfulness of meanings, since the individual episodes may live their own lives without being limited by anything external to them. In the metonymic text, meaning is less centred, more fluid, constantly on the move. *Orlando* does not take even its own figures of speech seriously; it often forgets them and starts creating new ones which do not necessarily converge with the previous ones. The situation is very similar in the case of the protagonist. Metonymic texts are anti-essentialist; they deny all forms and notions of essence behind the surface that could limit the free play of meanings coming from the body, and as such they also subvert the idea of any coherent self. In one of the *par excellence* metonymic genres with a clear influence on the novel, the picaresque, one cannot find characters with psychological 'depth.' Voltaire's *Candide* or Sade's *Justine* are not really rounded characters: they seem to lack depth or a complexity of inner layers. Orlando is their true companion in

this respect. These characters seem to lack what is so central in European thinking, the Cartesian core of the personality that would keep them together, make them self-identical, and would keep them from changing in space and time, under different circumstances. These typical, metonymically structured anti-heroes may represent the repressed *other* side of our traditional (metaphysical, phallogocentric) view of the self.

The influence of history and external circumstances on Orlando's personality is often mentioned and demonstrated in the novel. Orlando changes together with the world, his/her nature, temperament and behaviour are determined by these 'external' conditions, for example by his/her clothes. The novel talks about Orlando's variety of selves over many pages. The only problem (Orlando's only problem) is that (s)he cannot find a central (Cartesian) self that would unite or organise the others:

> So Orlando, at the turn by the barn, called 'Orlando?' with a note of interrogation in her voice and waited. Orlando did not come.
>
> 'All right then,' Orlando said, with the good humour people practice on these occasions; and tried another. For she had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand. Choosing then only those selves we have found room for, Orlando may now have called on the boy who cut the nigger's head down; the boy who strung it up again; the boy who sat on the hill; the boy who saw the poet; the boy who handled the Queen the bowl of rose water...
>
> Perhaps; but what appeared certain (for now we are in the region of 'perhaps' and 'appears') was that the one that she needed most kept aloof, for she was, to hear her talk, changing her selves as quickly as she drove – there was a new one at every corner – as happens when, for some unaccountable reason, the conscious self, which is the uppermost, and has the power to desire, wishes to be nothing but one self. This is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all. Orlando was certainly seeking this self… (Woolf 213–4).

Thus, Orlando's identity is an open one, formed by accidental circumstances, and there is no "Captain-self" that would control the others. One gets to know most about Orlando from the style and the metonymies of the text: from the image of the castle that (s)he lives in, that of the oak tree that (s)he likes lying under, and the poem *The Oak Tree* that (s)he has written and always keeps by her/himself. In this respect, s/he resembles the novel too: in its metonymic slidings and displacements, the basic constituents of 'proper' symbolic systems (such as the binary oppositions of essence and appearance, male and female, or internal and external) are dislocated. In *Orlando*, the "*one* of form, of

the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning" that Irigaray lists in *This Sex* as the characteristics of patriarchal phallomorphism (Irigaray 26) are all missing. The difference between appearance and essence collapses, and the subject is always only what we can see at the moment, in that particular situation. The subject is neither a master of being nor that of the world: (s)he is inseparable from it, has no existence without it.

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Transl. Richard Miller. Hill and Wang, 1975.

Batchelor, John. *Virginia Woolf: The Major Novels*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

Belsey, Catherine. *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*. Blackwell, 1994.

Booker, M. Keith. "What's the Difference?: Carnivalization of Gender in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*." *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature: Transgression, Abjection and the Carnivalesque*. U of Florida P, 1991, 162–185.

Brooks, Peter. *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*. Harvard UP, 1993.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Routledge, 1978.

Freud, Sigmund. *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Transl. James Strachey, Penguin, 1973.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Transl. Catherine Porter. Cornell UP, 1985.

Knopp, Sherron E. "'If I saw you would you kiss me?': Sapphism and Subversiveness of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*." *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing*. Ed. Joseph Bristow. Routledge, 1992, 111–26.

Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Transl. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez. Columbia UP, 1980.

Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. Transl. Bruce Fink. Norton, 2006.

---. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Transl. Dennis Porter. Norton, 1997.

Minow-Pinkney, Makiko. *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*. Harvester P, 1987.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. Routledge, 1991.

Séllei, Nóra. *A másik Woolf: Kulturális (ön)reflexivitás Virginia Woolf harmincas évekbeli szövegeiben*. Debrecen UP, 2012.

---. "A nő mint szubjektum, a női szubjektum – Bevezetés." *A nő mint szubjektum, a női szubjektum*. Ed. Nóra Séllei. DEENK, 2007, 7–16.

---. "Az önéletrajzírás (lehetetlensége) – Virginia Woolf: 'Vázlat a múltról'." Séllei Nóra, *Tükröm, tükröm: Írónők önéletrajzai a 20. század elejéről.* DEENK, 2001, 53–98.

Whitford, Margaret. *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*. Routledge, 1991.

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando* [1928]. Penguin Books, 1993.