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**The Concept of Homosexuality in Virginia Woolf's
works; *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando: A Biography***

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářkou práci na téma „Homosexuality in Virginia Woolf's works; *Mrs. Dalloway and Orlando*“ vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne

Podpis

Tato práce se zabývá tématem homosexuality v dílech Virginie Woolfové. Teoretická část představuje pojem homosexuality a jejího vnímání v dané době, poté se bude věnovat homosexualitě samotné autorky a jejího pohledu na danou problematiku. Stěžejní částí práce bude analýza autorčiných románů *Paní Dallowayová* a životopisného románu *Orlando* z hlediska vyobrazení homosexuality postav. V rámci jednotlivých kapitol práce postupně zkoumá postavy spojené s touto tematikou. Práce se věnuje vývoji homosexuality v dané době a v autorčině životě, zejména pak snaze autorky poukázat na existenci homosexuality ve světle tehdejšího veskrze negativního společenského konsensu.

This thesis deals with the topic of homosexuality as portrayed in Virginia Woolf's works. The theoretical part focuses on introducing the concept of homosexuality and the perception of it by society at that time. The rest of the work deals with the homosexuality of the author herself and her perspective of the topic. The mainstay of this thesis is the analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando: A Biography* from the point of view of its character's homosexuality. The work studies each homosexual character within the individual chapters. The thesis explores gradual development of homosexuality during these years and in Woolf's life, particularly author's pursuit to indicate the existence of homosexuality even in society's negative perception at that time.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this thesis is to show Virginia Woolf in a different light than just under the label of a lesbian or ‘a Sapphist’¹ in literature. Virginia Woolf was a complex, extremely intelligent and visionary human being that used her writings to show there are different possibilities and alternative sexualities than what the society allowed people to see. Woolf ‘pleaded powerfully for the need to represent women loving women.’² This she tries to do in her writings, conveying a message through her characters.

The first part of the thesis introduces homosexuality and different movements that helped the society to understand the notion better and eventually accept it. I focus on the concept of homosexuality and what it means to be a homosexual. I will acquaint the readers with the gradual development of homosexuality and how it was perceived in the British society throughout the years, ending with its legalization. The goal is to give an inkling of the period in which Woolf lived and wrote so as to explain the importance of Woolf’s creation of homosexual characters.

Second part is dedicated to Woolf’s life. The main interest is in her relationships, primarily in her own homosexual affair, from which emerged *Orlando: A Biography*.

The main part of this thesis is the analysis of two Woolf’s novels: *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando: A Biography*. I inquire into every character, that I perceive as a homosexual. I explain the reasons and moments in which I observed these inclinations. When possible, I try to connect them with Woolf’s real-life experience, to point out Woolf’s intent to mirror her sexuality into those characters. The analysis is based on my reading of given novels and my on my individual interpretations.

¹ Note: lesbian

² Gabriele Griffin, *Who’s Who in Lesbian and Gay Writing* (London: Routledge, 2005), 289.

2 THE CONCEPT OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Encyclopaedia Britannica provides this definition of homosexuality: ‘Homosexuality, sexual interest in and attraction to members of one’s own sex.’³ This term is now widely known and accepted in most places around the world. Homosexuality was seen as something unnatural and in some cultures even as something that is to be cured. However, in Great Britain, it was mainly perceived as something illegal, a criminal offense. Nevertheless, people belonging to the LGBTQ, which is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning, fought hard for their position in society. In this part of the thesis, I will concentrate on the development of Queer Theory and then development of homosexuality in England from the first law that targeted it. Another important part is the explanation of the movements that led to the loosening of the anti-homosexuality laws. The main interest lies in the years of Virginia Woolf’s life and writing and how it affected her and her characters.

2.1 Queer Theory

The term ‘queer’ started as a homophobic word or a word that was used as a slang. Eventually, it developed from classical lesbian and gay studies into a word with a bigger meaning. To begin with the simplest explanation possible, it is fitting to use an extract from Riki Wilchins’ book: ‘Queer theory is at heart about politics – things like power and identity language, and difference.’⁴ Queer theory as an academic field was created by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and her work called *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985).⁵ The term itself, however, was coined by Teresa de Lauretis.⁶ It is an umbrella term that crosses many boundaries and is against all stereotypes and labels that are used to describe different individuals.

This theory was developed under the influence of many different cultural contexts. Between those were the gay liberation movement, lesbian and feminist movements. With these movements came great feelings of pride and self-confidence, completely new sensations for people that were forced to hide most of their lives. At that time, ‘women were heterosexual homemakers [...] considered socially and

³ ‘Homosexuality.’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. May 17, 2002. Accessed December 8, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/homosexuality>

⁴ Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer* (New York: Alyson Books, 2014), 9.

⁵ See Sarah Phillips, ‘Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.’ *The Guardian*. May 12, 2009. Accessed April 20, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/12/eve-kosofsky-sedgwick-obituary-queer-theory>

⁶ See ‘Queer Theory.’ *Oxford Reference*. Accessed April 20, 2020. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100358573>

psychologically incomplete until they had a man to marry, bear children with him, and make a home for him.’⁷ All this made lesbians feel lost, alienated from others. On the other hand, men were the money makers, the heads of families. Those roles were in existence for centuries, they were efficient, and they were perceived as right. For these reasons, people in same sex relationships only met in secret while having a family life on the outside.

2.2 Development of homosexuality in England

It is a widely known fact, that homosexuality was a criminal offense for a long period of time. Homosexuality was not only illegal, but also perceived as something to be cured. Because of that, many people were forced to hide their identities and feelings from the world and sometimes even from themselves. The word ‘homosexuality’ only began to be used in the nineteenth century, establishing a new identity.

The very first act that was passed against homosexuals is the Buggery Act and comes from as early as 1533.⁸ It dictates the capital punishment for homosexual acts, but it was not only established against homosexuals, but against different acts of sodomy as well. This means that every sexual act that was not likely to contribute to the reproduction was labelled inappropriate and unnatural. This was not abolished until 1861, when the punishment changed to a minimum of a decade long imprisonment.⁹ People must have felt scared and guilty for having any intimate relationship. Homosexuals had little to no chance of living a happy life with a partner whom they loved. These laws targeted every homosexual, between those also celebrities like the author Oscar Wilde, who fell a victim to the next changes which came just few years later in 1885, making any male homosexual activity illegal even when conducted in private and without any witnesses.¹⁰ This law is even more strict than those before. It is very intrusive and controlling. Homosexual people were already scared and being a homosexual and a celebrity, with people always watching one’s actions must have been very hard. According to *The Guardian* there were nearly 100,000 men arrested between

⁷ Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*, 9.

⁸ See Michael Levy, ‘Gay rights movement,’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. June 15, 2020. Accessed June 20, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/gay-rights-movement#ref1077994>

⁹ See Michael Levy, ‘Gay rights movement,’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Accessed June 20, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/gay-rights-movement#ref1077994>

¹⁰ See Michael Levy, ‘Gay rights movement,’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Accessed June 20, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/gay-rights-movement#ref1077994>

the years of 1885 and 2013 for same-sex acts.¹¹ The 1895 trial of Oscar Wilde, already a leading playwright at that time, served as a great warning. His trial and conviction were highly publicised and showed that the government is not afraid even when it comes to a high-ranking person. This act had an immense impact on the homosexual community and it brought the coming down process to a standstill, paralysing them with fear. Still, the nineteenth century in England was marked by homosexual literature. These books would be published for public reading only rarely, but if so, all the homosexuality would be consciously camouflaged such as in Woolf's writing. It was not helpful that some important authors of nineteenth century would also publicly speak against homosexuality. Between those authors would be some grand names such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge or Percy Bysshe Shelly, calling homosexuality 'that very worst of all possible vices' or 'inconceivable to the imagination of a modern European.'¹² The effect of authors standing up against authors would be immense.

Another thing is, that there was never a law that would talk specifically about female homosexuality, which was then perceived as a discrimination towards men. 'This was because of prevailing assumptions that women did not have a sexuality and were plagued by sexual urges in the same way men were [...].'¹³ This assumption existed for several centuries. Nevertheless, the government decided to bring up a legislation talking about women homosexuality in the 1920s¹⁴, but it was eventually discharged since the lawmakers feared it would have opposite effect; women might become more interested and curious about lesbianism. This idea is based solely on the idea that women have no feelings, desires or sexualities which seems ridiculous. Women during these times would have much more freedom in their sexual lives, since they were not the targeted group. If we compare the view of men homosexuality and women homosexuality, we have two quite different views. Still, women were supposed to be devoted wives and it would be immoral to have a lesbian relationship, but it probably would not even be noticed since close women friendships could conceal a lot.

¹¹ See Peter Tatchell, 'Don't fall for the myth that it's 50 years since we decriminalised homosexuality,' *The Guardian*. May 23, 2017. Accessed December 9, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/may/23/fifty-years-gay-liberation-uk-barely-four-1967-act>

¹² Claude J. Summers, *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*. (London: Routledge, 2013), 226.

¹³ James Treadwell and Adam Lynes, *50 Facts Everyone Should Know about Crime & Punishment in Britain* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2019), 23, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvmd85p6>

¹⁴ A timeline of LGBTQ communities in the UK,' *The British Library*. Accessed April 4, 2020. <https://www.bl.uk/lgbtq-histories/lgbtq-timeline>

In 1922 Woolf met Vita Sackville-West.¹⁵ During this time, lesbianism was marked distasteful and an attack on the ‘fundamental institutions of society.’¹⁶ This would without a doubt have an effect on the relationship they were building, but it could not have stopped them anyway.

Gradually people realized, that there needed to be more places that are pro-homosexuality. People established cafés and clubs that were designed mainly for homosexuals, places where they could meet and feel safe. Some professions also allowed homosexuals to flourish, such as actors in theatres, singers, painters and even writers, if they stayed cautious. These people had much more freedom to explore their feelings through their own art.

The main years of interest are during Virginia Woolf’s life. Many notable changes came after World War I. People became more educated about this topic and gradually opened up to discussions and acceptance. What is extraordinary about the early 20th century is the fact that at some places, homosexuality was very much in the open and celebrated. Widely popular at that time were for example drag balls, which are competitions of drag queens or in other words of man using women’s makeup and clothing to imitate often an exaggerated version of a woman. People often found their partners while attending drag balls where everyone was in the open about their true identity: ‘At a private ballroom in Holland Park Avenue, west London, 60 men were arrested in a police raid after undercover officers had watched them dancing, kissing and having sex in make-up and women's clothes.’¹⁷ The period after World War I is also marked by the prominence of lesbian writers such as Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West.

Even though the view did not change much until the 1960s when authorities decided to change the law and make homosexuality partially decriminalised, homosexuals were perceived progressively better. This gave many authors, including Woolf, more space and possibilities in writing and in life. That might also be why she did not hide her affair with Vita. Society was more liberal with the passing time and her writing also shed some light on these themes and issues. Plus, women homosexuality was never actually illegal. Woolf used her writing to inform and educate society about

¹⁵ See Virginia Woolf, *Selected Diaries* (London: Vintage, 2008), 137.

¹⁶ ‘A timeline of LGBTQ communities in the UK,’ *The British Library*. Accessed April 4, 2020. <https://www.bl.uk/lgbtq-histories/lgbtq-timeline>

¹⁷ Tania Branigan, ‘Pride and Prejudice in the Gay 1920s,’ *The Guardian*. July 3, 2004. Accessed December 10, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/jul/03/gayrights.world>

homosexuality and pleaded with other writers to produce stories about women loving women. The 1960s legalization again talked only about men and legalized the same-sex acts for men over 21 years old and conducted in private.¹⁸ This was still a discrimination, since sex between men and women was legal from the age of 16. Fortunately, the legal changes never stopped coming and Woolf's themes are now the pillars for many feminists and homosexuals.

2.3 Boston marriage

Boston marriage is a special term for two women living together.¹⁹ These women were not dependent on men or their money. They were usually wealthy, which made them able to live without a man. Boston marriage was basically a red herring. These women were living in a happy lesbian relationship for everyone to see, yet they were doing it legally.

These marriages were in existence in the turn of the 20th century. It is hard to imagine, that in a time where many different laws targeted homosexuals as strongly as they could, they let women get married. However, since women were seen as creatures without sexualities, male law makers never thought about these marriages as anything more than a very close friendship between women.

It was always socially acceptable for women to show affection towards other women. They were free to hold hands, hug or even kiss in the open. The Boston marriage took this step further, enabling them to call each other wife or share a bed.²⁰ Still without anyone realizing the true value of such a relationship.

This really makes one think about the difference between the perception of men and women. There was this ignorance towards women and their feelings, romantic or sexual. Women were perceived as such noble creatures, yet without the realization that there might be more under the surface. Nevertheless, all these ladies were probably quite thankful for it, since it gave them the freedom to marry their same sex lover and openly live together without arousing any suspicion.

¹⁸ 'A timeline of LGBTQ communities in the UK,' *The British Library*. Accessed April 4, 2020.

<https://www.bl.uk/lgbtq-histories/lgbtq-timeline>

¹⁹ See Erin Blakemore, 'Women Got 'Married' Long Before Gay Marriage,' *History*. December 28, 2017. Accessed August 4, 2020. <https://www.history.com/news/women-got-married-long-before-gay-marriage>

²⁰ See Blakemore, 'Women Got 'Married' Long Before Gay Marriage. *History*. Accessed August 4, 2020. <https://www.history.com/news/women-got-married-long-before-gay-marriage>

2.4 English society's view of homosexuality

It is already clear, that homosexuality in all forms was seen as something strictly immoral, unhealthy and most of all, it was perceived as a serious crime. Back in time, when doctors were only beginning to take a look at human psyche, people looked judgmentally not only at the people who needed such a doctor, but also at the doctors themselves. The whole society needed some time to realize, that homosexuality was not a disease to be cured nor an illegal act.

Studies about homosexuality were beginning to surface in the nineteenth century. It would be fair to say that the conclusions to which they came did not benefit the homosexuals nor did they encourage the society to see homosexuality in a better light. Some of these studies claimed that homosexuality emerged from a stunted individual development and was a manifestation of moral insanity.²¹ These statements had, of course, an immediate impact on the perception of homosexuality by the wide society.

In the twentieth century, homosexuality began to be perceived as a social problem. In 1913 the Parliament of the United Kingdom introduced the Mental Deficiency Act. This bill was established to oversee certain classes of people, namely *idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded persons* and *moral imbeciles*.²² With this bill was also established the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded,²³ who labelled homosexuals as the social problem group.²⁴ Once being labelled a social problem, it is inevitable to be disdained and disrespected by society. Because of this, the first years of twentieth century are marked by attempts to keep homosexuality hidden. This was changed by the World War One, which opened up the world to new possibilities after its end. It is even said that the post-war years made homosexuality a prominent interest of the society.²⁵ This would make the people growing up at this time more open towards their sexualities, less fearful of homosexuality and the new identity

²¹ See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1979), 27.

²² See Harvey G. Simmons, 'Explaining Social Policy: The English Mental Deficiency Act of 1913,' *Journal of Social History*, vol. 11, no. 3 (Spring 1978), 398. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3786821?seq=1>

²³ See Simmons, 'Explaining Social Policy: The English Mental Deficiency Act of 1913,' *Journal of Social History*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3786821?seq=1>

²⁴ See Chris Waters, 'The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain 1945-1968,' *Journal of Social History*, vol. 51, no. 3 (July 2012), 692-693. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23265600>

²⁵ See Summers, *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*, 226.

it represented for the society. Between those people were young writers that would help the society by showing their homosexuality in the open.

One greatly important group of the twentieth century in literature as well as in understanding and accepting different sexualities is the Bloomsbury group. Bloomsbury is also the group connected with Virginia Woolf, which makes it an important part of her life, development and sexual acceptance. Bloomsbury group was accepting of homosexuality and bisexuality while also embracing literature touching those ideas.²⁶ The authors were usually feeling some hostility toward social conventions and restrictions, welcoming the safe space this group and its members represented. Since it was not a secret that homosexuals created a large part of the group, people had their own way of calling them. ‘Bloomsbuggers’²⁷ was a term used to mark these writers. Between those persons would be such names as E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey or Duncan Grant.²⁸ Even though such an important group of highly regarded writers was openly promoting homosexuality, it was still a concept that was hard to grasp for the England society, but also for their fellow authors. Even though some law changes followed and shaped the society towards acceptance, there still would be people strongly opposed to homosexuality, perceiving heterosexual intercourse as the only natural form.

To conclude this theoretical part, it is important to emphasize the illegality of homosexuality. The possibility of being convicted for loving someone is hard to imagine for most people. Virginia Woolf had to live during that time and still had enough courage to write about homosexual characters and inspire future movements.

²⁶ Summers, *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*, 101

²⁷ Summers, *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*, 101.

²⁸ Summers, *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*, 101

3 VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf, in full original name Adeline Virginia Stephen, was an English writer, born in London, 1882, into a very influential household in Kensington. Her father was Sir Leslie Stephen, who was the first editor of *The Dictionary of National Biography*,²⁹ one of the most prominent figures of that time and a great contributor to the English literature. Her mother was Julia Prinsep Stephen, born Jackson, is mainly connected with the Pre-Raphaelite movement. This connection exists due to her beauty, making her the model of the Pre-Raphaelite painters.³⁰ Their marriage brought together two families, since both of Woolf's parents were married and widowed before.³¹ The connection of these two families gave the author seven siblings in total. Since her parents were extremely influential and well-known people at that time, she got the chance to meet different grand names in the society. Woolf saw them as narrow-minded, she wanted more freedom, equality and understanding, because growing up with brothers made her see the distinctions between her position and theirs.³²

Even though her brothers were educated in such institutes as Cambridge, neither she any of her sisters were allowed to attend college and were educated at home.³³ This led to them trying to steal education and knowledge from their father's study until it was possible for Virginia to continue her studies at the Ladies' Department of King's College London.³⁴ Nevertheless, Virginia was fascinated by writing already in her early years of life. With her siblings, she started a weekly family newspaper at the beginning of 1891; *Hyde Park Gate News*.³⁵ The name came from the address of their home. The

²⁹ See The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Sir Leslie Stephen,' *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. February 18, 2020. Accessed March 3, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leslie-Stephen>

³⁰ See 'Virginia Woolf Biography,' *The Biography*. July 20, 2017. Accessed April 5, 2020. <https://www.biography.com/writer/virginia-woolf>

³¹ See Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (London: Penguin Group, 2005), 336.

³² See Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, 115.

³³ See Benjamin Schwarz, 'The Education of Virginia Woolf,' *The Atlantic*. December 2020. Accessed January 26, 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/12/education-virginia-woolf/309168/>

³⁴ 'Notable Alumni: Virginia Woolf,' *King's London College*. Accessed January 27, 2020. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/people/virginia-woolf>

³⁵ See "'Hyde Park Gate News', a magazine by Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell," *British Library*. October 29, 2015. Accessed January 27, 2020. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/hyde-park-gate-news-a-magazine-by-virginia-woolf-and-vanessa-bell>

last issue of their newspaper was published in 1895. This would make Virginia 10 years old when she started to develop her voice as a writer.³⁶

It is widely known, that Woolf suffered from mental health problems throughout her whole life. Since at that time, people did not understand mental illness, it was near to impossible to deal with it. Her first nervous breakdown came when she was only thirteen years old, after the death of the mother in 1895.³⁷ Another big factor causing her mental health decline was the sexual abuse she suffered from her half-brothers: ‘At the age of six she was molested by her half-brother, Gerald, who was eighteen at that time. [...] When Woolf was thirteen, she was molested by her other half-brother, George, who was then twenty-nine.’³⁸ Another great misfortune that affected her was the death of her father in 1904, which led to her being institutionalized for a while.³⁹ These problems are reflected in her works such as one can see in *Mrs. Dalloway*. This also seems to be one of the factors that influenced her sexuality.

Woolf began writing professionally in 1905 during which period she moved to Bloomsbury in London.⁴⁰ There she made connections with the Bloomsbury Group, which was developing at that time. Here she also met her future husband, Leonard Woolf, and many influential writers that were part of the group.

Woolf married Leonard Woolf in 1912.⁴¹ During this time, she was trying to write her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, for a few years already.⁴² Her mental health was not getting any better and she resorted towards suicide.⁴³ Woolf tried to commit suicide several different times. However, during 1915, her first novel was finally published, and she later established herself as a critic while also writing reviews.⁴⁴

The marriage lasted, even though one could perceive it more as a friendship. Leonard Woolf was helping and supporting Virginia for the rest of her life. He was guarding her throughout her life, making it possible for her to write one of the most

³⁶ See “‘Hyde Park Gate News’, a magazine by Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell,” *British Library*. Accessed January 27, 2020. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/hyde-park-gate-news-a-magazine-by-virginia-woolf-and-vanessa-bell>

³⁷ See Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1997), 75.

³⁸ Sara Culver, ‘Virginia Woolf as an Incest Survivor,’ *Grand Valley Review*, vol. 6: iss. 1, article 18. Accessed January 27, 2020. <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol6/iss1/18>

³⁹ See Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, 38.

⁴⁰ See Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, 13.

⁴¹ See Suyin Haynes, ‘What to Know About Virginia Woolf’s Love Affair with Vita Sackville-West,’ *Time*. August 23, 2019. Accessed February 3, 2020. <https://time.com/5655270/virginia-woolf-vita-sackville-west-relationship/>

⁴² See Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, 4.

⁴³ See Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 1.

⁴⁴ Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 14.

important pieces of literature during her lifetime. Nevertheless, her health was getting progressively worse. These problems were even enhanced by the First World War, which then became a frequent topic of her later works.

Virginia Woolf wrote a suicide note for her husband and her sister Vanessa in 1941, thinking ‘that she was so far down the remembered road of madness there would be no getting over it.’⁴⁵ In March of 1941, Virginia Woolf drowned herself in the River Ouse.

She was, as a writer, very much interested in capturing the moment, all the good and the bad included. Woolf wanted for the reader to experience and perceive every small detail and every quick thought. She wanted to do justice to the human consciousness with her literature, which might be why she chose to use stream of consciousness. Since Woolf was, and also perceived herself, as a modernist writer, her need to develop and use modern techniques can be seen in her books and essays. This modernist approach is visible in the fact, that she is one of the first authors, that started to point out homosexuality through her characters, which is the main theme of this thesis. Many of her books were also adopted as feminist works around 1970s, mainly “A Room of One’s Own” in which she’s describing the importance of women being their own beings, with their own money and space to live in and develop.⁴⁶ The importance of being an independent person can also be seen in her other works, such as *Mrs. Dalloway* or *Orlando*.

3.1 Virginia Woolf’s relations

The author married Leonard Woolf in 1912, even though they knew each other since 1904, and they stayed together until Virginia’s death in 1941. Virginia was quite doubtful about the possibility of her marrying Leonard. She wrote to him after his proposal: ‘[...] I will not look upon marriage as a profession. [...] Again, I want everything—love, children, adventure, intimacy, work. [...] I sometimes think, that if I married you, I could have everything—and then—it is the sexual side of it that comes between us?’⁴⁷ Woolf eventually accepted the proposal and married Leonard. When they married, Woolf was already 30 years old. From their honeymoon, Virginia wrote a letter to her friend, in which she asked: ‘Why do you think people make such a fuss

⁴⁵ Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 499.

⁴⁶ See Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, 236.

⁴⁷ Nigel Nicolson, ed., *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 1, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 496.

about marriage and copulation? [...] I find the climax immensely exaggerated.’⁴⁸ This statement clearly shows Woolf’s view when it came to any physical relationship with her husband, already suggesting there might be a problem coming from her sexuality. It is true, however, that she warned him about this possibility: ‘As I told you brutally the other day, I feel no physical attraction in you. There are moments—when you kissed me the other day was one—when I feel no more than a rock.’⁴⁹ Nevertheless, their marriage lasted and was, concerning all the circumstances, quite a success.

A vital person, when it comes to Woolf’s relationships, was Vita Sackville-West, whom the author met during a dinner with Clive Bell on 14 December 1922: ‘I am too muzzy headed to make out anything. This is partly the result of dining to meet the lovely gifted aristocratic Sackville-West last night at Clive’s.’⁵⁰ It is obvious that Woolf was charmed by Vita after their very first meeting, immediately writing about her in her diary. With Vita, Virginia had her most intense relationship and probably the only one that was also on the physical level.⁵¹ Vita was also a writer and had a similar life with her husband as Virginia with Leonard.⁵² Her marriage was more of a friendship than love and Vita herself talked about the intimacy she had with Virginia with her husband.⁵³ Though both married women, they began an affair. Vita was the younger one, yet she was already known as a ‘Sapphist.’⁵⁴ Their relations were well known but no one seemed to be troubled by it. In the letters between Vita and Harold, Vita was so honest, she even told Harold about her sexual relations with Virginia.⁵⁵ Their passionate affair lasted over a decade, many of it captured in letters they sent to each other and in their diaries. Virginia wrote about Vita talking about her beauty, her body, admiring all the physical about her but, surprisingly, not talking so nicely about her intellect: ‘She is stag like, or race horse like, save for the face, which pouts, and has no very sharp brain. But as a body hers is perfection.’⁵⁶ On the other hand, Vita adored Virginia for her wisdom and genius. They wrote each other some of the most beautiful

⁴⁸ Curtis Sittenfeld, ‘Yes, Virginia,’ *The New York Times*. November 20, 2005. Accessed February 4, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/20/books/review/yes-virginia.html>

⁴⁹ Nicolson, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, 496.

⁵⁰ Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 153.

⁵¹ See Summers, *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*, 709.

⁵² See Nigel Nicolson, ed., *Vita and Harold: The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson*, (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1992), 6.

⁵³ See Louise A. DeSalvo and Mitchell Alexander Leaska, eds., *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, (San Francisco: Cleis Press Inc., 2001), 10.

⁵⁴ Summers, *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*, 710.

⁵⁵ See Nicolson, *Vita and Harold*, 10.

⁵⁶ Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 182.

love letters, confessing their feelings towards one another. The outcome of their love is, as it is widely called, the longest love letter of all times: *Orlando: A Biography*. Their affair eventually ended, but their strong friendship lasted for a long time afterwards.⁵⁷

3.2 Hints of homosexuality in Woolf's writing

On 19 August 1930 Virginia wrote a letter to Ethel Smyth: 'It is true that I only want to show off to women. Women alone stir my imagination.'⁵⁸ Woolf criticized the male sexual dominance in all the possible ways, many people read her essays and memoirs as a fight against the patriarchal domination.⁵⁹ She was vocal about being against rape and incest, as it was something coming from her own experience. She also criticized marriage itself.⁶⁰ Sometimes, interestingly, she went completely against heterosexual relationships, even though she was married.

Woolf was not one to write about things explicitly. Her typical style is full of metaphors, imagination and slight hints that would direct the readers focus exactly where she wanted. Woolf would indicate and offer different clues about the topic and about her own desires, but she would rarely explicitly state what she was thinking. This is what makes her writing even more interesting and captivating.

'The first and only novel to explicitly deal with both female eroticism and the figure of the lesbian is *Mrs Dalloway* [...].'⁶¹ In *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf never says anything about Clarissa Dalloway being a lesbian yet by the end of the novel the reader is able to come to that conclusion all the same. That is also the case with Septimus, one must come to that conclusion on their own while reading through his memories and thoughts, but the outcome is inevitable. The little hints are usually hidden in the character's behaviour, reactions and thoughts. Every detail seems to be important and fits into a bigger picture. Woolf gives more attention to emotions rather than actions; what people feel and what they desire seems to be of the biggest importance.

⁵⁷ See Summers, *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*, 710.

⁵⁸ Blanche Wiesen Cook, "'Women Alone Stir My Imagination': Lesbianism and The Cultural Tradition.' *Signs* 4, no. 4 (summer 1979), 728. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173368?seq=1>

⁵⁹ See Jeanne Schulkind, ed., *Virginia Woolf: Moments of Being*, red. ed. (London: Pimlico, 2002), x.

⁶⁰ Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life*, 7.

⁶¹ Summers, *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*, 710.

4 MRS. DALLOWAY

Virginia Woolf published *Mrs Dalloway* in 1925. The author first started writing this book in 1923 under the name *The Hours*. During the writing process of this book she criticized her work a lot, comparing herself to other authors and the way they say one should write. In her diary she states: ‘One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoevsky. And do I? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? No I think not. In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense.’⁶² And it is fair to say, that she was able to express all that in this book.

Mrs Dalloway is written in the stream of consciousness narrative, which is the typical style of writing for Woolf. This style of writing helps to show the chaos of life. The reader is drawn into the mind of the writer and can feel as a part of the story itself. Woolf perceived this novel as arduous but with serious merit,⁶³ which seems to be one of the best ways to describe it. Both Virginia and her husband perceived this book as her best at that time and they also published it on their own, by their press.

When the book first came out, the reviews were mixed. The author herself captures the reactions in her diary entry from 15 May 1925, shortly after the publication: ‘Two unfavourable reviews of *Mrs Dalloway*: unintelligible, not art &c.’⁶⁴ However, *Mrs Dalloway* was getting more and more successful and just a month later, in June 1925 there were already more copies sold than of her other books in a year.⁶⁵

Homosexuality in this book is not at all on a full display. One must think about the society at that time, the culture and the perception of homosexuality at that period. It is hinted at, one must read between the lines to fully understand. The possibility to fully and openly talk about homosexuality was not yet an option, nevertheless Woolf was able to find a way around that in her deep immersion into each character’s feelings. The portrayal of homosexuality cannot be found in character’s actions but rather in their thoughts, desires and feelings that they talk about.

Mrs Dalloway is a novel that carries a great profundity even though it is hard to catch until the end of the story. From the beginning it seems as a story about a woman, Clarissa Dalloway, that is preparing a party of which she is the host. The reader goes

⁶² Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 164.

⁶³ See Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 165.

⁶⁴ Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 195.

⁶⁵ See Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 197.

with her through her day and sees everything and everyone through her eyes. The story is not as much about the actions that the characters undergo as it is about their inner self, which is an important realization. That is why the narration does not put emphasis on the doings or places as much as it does on the characters themselves and this proves that Woolf wanted the reader to focus on the characters themselves. Another character that we encounter is Septimus Smith, with who we explore his marriage, his feelings about war, being a veteran and how it changed his life. Through him is shown the shell shock, as was PTSD⁶⁶ called after the first World War, that the veterans experience. As the story approaches its end, Septimus is driven into committing suicide by his disturbed psyche and insanity that took over him after the war. Septimus' shattered soul could be seen as a mirror to the inner struggles that Mrs. Dalloway is dealing with in her life. Unfortunately, the reader does not get any answers about Clarissa Dalloway and her destiny. Once the reader gets through the tangle of everyone's inner thoughts, the understanding comes naturally. Although the story can be confusing at the beginning, the reader is eventually able to unravel characters' feelings. The story opens one's eyes to the sanity and insanity of the human mind, to the profoundness of inner thoughts and the chaos and the calm of everyday life.

4.1 Characters

The characters that will be scrutinized in this part are Clarissa Dalloway, Septimus Warren Smith and partly also Sally Seton. Of all the characters, these three seem to be the most important ones when it comes to the aspect of homosexuality and bisexuality. Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus Smith have surprisingly similar paths that often intertwine, and their lives give impression of them being two sides of one person, shadowing each other and nearing the same destiny. Sally Seton is mainly a memory, but a memory that shaped Mrs. Dalloway in an important way, which makes her character crucial to understand some of Clarissa's actions and feelings. In these characters, Woolf explores their desires in the context of the 1920's culture when homosexuality was legally considered a perversion linked to mental illnesses. This

⁶⁶ Note: post-traumatic stress disorder

suggests that Woolf and consequently her character of Mrs. Dalloway were ‘compelled to live in a relatively secret [...] sexual existence.’⁶⁷

4.1.1 Mrs. Dalloway

Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway is a woman of high society of Westminster. Her character is a portrait of the high life. She is concerned with a party, seemingly unbothered by any greater problems. Her life is polished, full of beautiful things. Nevertheless, the more she probes her mind, the more discontent she becomes. This already gives the idea, that there is something wrong. From the beginning, she might seem shallow not only to the readers, but even to the people that are close to her, which is caused by her constant struggle with her past that shaped her present. We soon discover that she is one to keep her emotions to herself, not letting anyone see what is really on the inside which is also caused by the restrictive culture she lives in. The reader finds out the most about her from her memories and thoughts, in which she is truly open. The memory she keeps coming back to is that of Sally Seton and Peter Walsh. Sally is an extremely important person that helps the reader to shape their idea of Clarissa’s true identity, or in other words, we can see that Clarissa once was in love with Sally. Peter Walsh, on the other hand, is an instigator of her attraction to man, that otherwise seem non-existent. It could be argued that Clarissa is bisexual.

It is always important to look under the surface and to read between the lines. Mrs. Dalloway may seem as quite a shallow character, but what affected her to be this way is significant. The only true passion she ever felt was towards a woman, which she herself indicates many times. She was forced to live through the horrors of the first World War and now has to face all the changes that are happening in the society. Another impact on her life was the death of her sister Sylvia that she saw with her own eyes: ‘To see your own sister killed by a falling tree [...] before your very eyes [...] was enough to turn one bitter.’⁶⁸ All these events would inevitably influence one’s psyche, making them more oriented towards the materialistic world, less involved with people. Mrs. Dalloway is affected to such an extent she sees the world quite pessimistically. Here we can see Clarissa’s connection to the writer herself.

⁶⁷ James Schiff, ‘Rewriting Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway: Homage, Sexual Identity, and the Single-Day Novel by Cunningham, Lippincott, and Lanchester,’ *Critique*, vol. 45, no. 4 (summer 2004), 368.

<http://www.paolacarbone.com/vo/rewriting%20woolf.pdf>

⁶⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2013), 72.

4.1.1.1 Relationships

Even though Clarissa is an independent woman and likes her own space, human relationships and connections are of a great importance to her. The most important ones are with Sally Seton, Peter Welsh and her husband, Richard Dalloway.

Sally Seton could be perceived as Clarissa's first love interest. The first, and maybe also the only person who ignited her sexual desires. Sally, for most part of the novel, only exists as a memory of Clarissa's as she recollects her first memories of Sally. Clarissa was completely enchanted by her from the first moment they met: 'But all of that evening she could not take her eyes off Sally. It was an extraordinary beauty of the kind she most admired [...].'⁶⁹ It would seem that Woolf got her inspiration from her own feelings when she met Vita. Clarissa eventually even asks herself, whether this relationship they had wasn't love. She is well aware about her feelings towards Sally, quite open with herself even though she knows it is against the society. She is not embarrassed at all which comes across as a surprising fact, making Clarissa stand out with self-acceptance. There can be found a striking resemblance between Clarissa's feelings and memories and Woolf's memories of Vita captured in her diaries.

In her memories, Clarissa ponders about the feelings she had towards Sally and the fact that she never felt anything like that towards anyone else. That alone is a powerful argument about Clarissa's sexuality. She felt thrill and excitement about seeing her, tried to do things that would please Sally, make her see Clarissa in the best light. This supports the idea that Clarissa was in love and was doing things that she hoped would make Sally fall in love with her. Their relationship escalated over time: 'Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down!'⁷⁰ This is the moment that the reader experiences an epiphany concerning Clarissa's sexuality. It is caused not by the kiss itself, but by Clarissa's reaction to it and the way she talks about it. It awakes all these feelings inside of her, she talks about revelation and religious feeling.⁷¹ Nevertheless, they both knew what was expected from them and they both realized quite soon that this relationship would not be possible. They were expected to become society wives, bear children and host parties. Their paths eventually separated, and we can see at the end of the story,

⁶⁹ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 29.

⁷⁰ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 31.

⁷¹ See Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 32.

when Sally comes to Clarissa's party, that they are merely friends. Both were different, with husbands and children, only remembering their fleeting romance. This again is quite similar to the development of Woolf's relationship with Vita, which suggests that the author could have been drawing from her own experience.

Peter Welsh is mentioned on the very first page. This already indicates his importance in Clarissa's life. It is hard to distinguish Clarissa's feelings towards Peter. At first, he seemed to be her best friend, someone she could talk to about anything. They would spend many days together, discussing what interested them, fighting over their different opinions. The more we read however, the deeper understanding of their relationship we get. There seems to be a connection that cannot be broken. Quite similar to Woolf connection to her husband. Clarissa could have married Peter but eventually decided not to. The question here could be, why not marry someone you are close to and you like spending time with. Clarissa is a considerably independent woman for the early twentieth century. She herself chose someone with whom she would feel as independent and free as possible. It seems as if this was a choice between being tied down in a marriage without true love or being in a marriage without love yet staying quite unrestricted. Woolf herself was in a marriage without true love but had enough freedom to create this amazing partnership with her husband. Also, Peter was in love with Clarissa, but it does not seem to be that way the other way around, which she stated quite clearly while commenting on his interference in her kiss with Sally: '[...] she felt his hostility; his jealousy; his determination to break into their companionship.'⁷² This could have been one of the reasons for her choice of not marrying him. Even after so many years, and precisely five years of Peter being away, he is still in love with her. On their encounter, he is trembling, feeling embarrassed, feeling as a failure compared to her and even when telling her that he had met someone, that he is in love, but he does not seem very happy about it. He does not sound genuine at all, diminishing his new love while comparing her to Clarissa. Nevertheless, at this moment, Clarissa is still repeating to herself the fact she was just told; Peter is in love. It touched her in a way. Not because she would love him, but because, allegedly, she is not the one he loves anymore. This relationship that Woolf describes bears strong similarities to her relationship with her husband. It would seem quite possible, that Leonard Woolf inspired the character of Peter.

⁷² Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 32.

All of the sudden, Clarissa's thoughts are completely different. As if she actually was in love with Peter, at least a little bit. They are able to share intimate and touching moments without feeling embarrassed about it. All at once, her thoughts are running the completely opposite way: 'If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!'⁷³ Her feelings are just as confused as Peter's. This whole situation indicates, that Peter would be Clarissa's heterosexual object of desire, but she decided not to act on her longing, something she learnt from her relations with Sally. So, she decided to marry for financial stability and freedom rather than for fleeting feelings and restrictions. My opinion on their relationship is not that of nearly everyone else, that Clarissa had no feelings towards Peter, that she only ever felt romantically towards Sally. In my opinion, she was in love with Peter as well, she was simply much more intrigued by her forbidden attraction to Sally and that is why she pushed Peter aside.

There is not much to be said about Richard Dalloway. He has basically no role in the story, except for being the husband. He is not important to the reader when it comes to his actions. His importance is in showing Clarissa in another angle, as a wife and a mother. How can one be a good wife to someone without have seemingly any feelings toward them is the real question. Their marriage is simply not about love or intimacy, it is about Richard having a wife and about Clarissa having financial stability. Richard is not, nor was he in any way indicated to be, at any point in time, object of Clarissa's desires. She only chose him over Peter for financial reasons. Together, they have a daughter, Elizabeth. Elizabeth is, just as Richard, a minor character in her actions, being in the story only a few times. However, Clarissa is wondering about Elizabeth's sexuality, thinking she is in love with her history teacher. This beautifully mirrors Clarissa's own experience with Sally and bringing up the question of sexuality all over again. The possibility of Elizabeth being a lesbian is an ingenious touch by Woolf, showing to the reader that is it simply a predisposition someone is born with.

⁷³ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 42.

4.1.1.2 The influence of homosexuality on her life

Clarissa is represented as an unstable individual when it comes to her sexuality. Her sexuality is used by Woolf to fight culturally set boundaries which the author herself felt restricted by during her life. Mrs. Dalloway is probably representing a bisexual woman, since her feelings towards Peter Welsh cannot be completely refuted. It is, however, quite clear that she had strong, romantic feelings towards Sally Seton and this influenced her whole life.

Clarissa's feelings are absolutely against the societal boundaries, which forces her to keep them in secrecy. She fell in love with a woman when she was only a teenager, realising her sexuality relatively soon. At that age, she would be susceptible to her feelings. Needless to say, she did succumb to her desires and to Sally, but she also fought hard against it, realising the reaction of the world she lived in and the impossibility of that relationship. Owing to this fact, she yielded to the society and the expectations towards her.

Nevertheless, her own decision shaped the rest of her life and the resentment she felt later. She seems repelled by the possibility of Elizabeth being in love with a woman. Quite a paradox, but it could be not a resentment towards lesbianism, but a disappointment that she was not allowed to live out her love story. She learnt to leave her feelings hidden, concentrate on material life and live in a loveless marriage of two incompatible people.

4.1.2 Septimus Warren Smith

Septimus is a war veteran affected by what was known as shell shock. This is interesting, because this condition of his could have been created by the author as a kind of a representation of her own psychological problems. In my opinion, Woolf might have projected this part of herself into this character but adjust the psychological condition to fit Septimus.

Septimus' condition is immediately visible and recognisable from his behaviour to every reader. Shell shock, now known as post-traumatic stress disorder, is a typical condition for war veterans and is represented quite clearly by his character: '[...] this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him.'⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 12.

These are Septimus' first feelings described in the story and it characterizes him adequately. He is lost in life and in his own mind, always at a loss as what to say and how to act. He spends most of the time building walls around himself to separate him from others. There is a profound numbness inside of him, that makes him feel useless, scared and spiteful towards everybody around him. It is hard to deal with something that is quite unexplainable to others, mainly to those close to you that did not see the things you did. Once being a soldier in a war, you are forced to do unimaginable things that affect you forever and no one will understand what you have to go through every day after that. Septimus is seeing things, hearing this. In his head, he is still on the battlefields, fighting for his life and for a life of another man, his friend Evans.

Evans is the main topic of almost all Septimus' hallucinations. He can see him, feel him and hear him all the time. And every time he sees him being well, alive and right in front of him, he seems so happy: '[...] only a few moments more, of this relief, of this joy, of this astonishing revelation –'⁷⁵ One time he is thinking about love that is just that, a love, not crime⁷⁶ which also makes me feel like he is talking about his love for Evans, which would, at that time, be perceived as crime.

However, he is a married man. His wife is Lucrezia, an Italian whom he met after the war. Septimus' passages in the story are mainly dark, depressing, showing his mental health, the effects of war on a human psyche and how that affects relationships, such as his and Lucrezia's. Their marriage suffers greatly not only by this condition, but also by the fact that Septimus seems, in my opinion, to be a homosexual.

4.1.2.1 Relationships

Septimus' only relationship that can be actually seen is his relationship with his wife. But I will also try to find more indications about his relationship with Evans and how he might have actually felt towards him, since the idea of a relationship seems to more likely than that of a simple friendship.

Lucrezia moved from Italy to live with Septimus in London, or as she calls it, that awful city.⁷⁷ Since Septimus is most of the time inside his head fighting with his demons, the information about their relationship mostly comes from Lucrezia's point of view. I would say, that Lucrezia was always more invested in the relationship. She is in

⁷⁵ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 65.

⁷⁶ See Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 62.

⁷⁷ See Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 61.

love with her husband still, even though his condition is affecting everything. She is talking about being happy, yet also miserable. As Septimus is lost in life, she is lost in their relationship. Lucrezia loves him dearly and gives everything she can to help him. She is not giving up on him but is unable to save him from himself at the end. In my personal reading of this character, I would say that Lucrezia might, in some ways, represent Woolf's husband. This opinion comes from the fact that they are both married to someone interested in same-sex partners and they are both fighting against the psychological problems of their spouses.

Their relationship from Septimus's point of view is much sadder. To him, it is over, an unhappy marriage: 'Their marriage was over, he thought, with agony, with relief.'⁷⁸ It is hard to say, whether he ever loved Lucrezia. They met in Milan, at the end of the war, because he billeted in her mother's house. Already at that time, the shell shock was developing and, as Septimus himself states, he could not feel anything. From this one could deduce, that Septimus got actually engaged and married by accident. He decided to do that just to calm down his shock and panic from not feeling anything, maybe in hope of developing some feelings towards Lucrezia. That, regrettably, did not happen and only led to an unhappy marriage. One more factor that I found revealing is that fact, that Septimus and Lucrezia do not have children even though she wants them. On top of that, it seems they do not have any intimate relationship between them. Lucrezia once states, that Shakespeare, one of the authors that Septimus read frequently, found love between man and woman repugnant and that sex between them was perversity.⁷⁹ At the end of this train of thoughts, she ponders about the fact that she still wants children and they are married for five years at that time. This to me insinuates that Septimus, reading a lot of Shakespeare and sharing a lot of his opinions about humanity, agrees with him even in this sphere of life.

Septimus' relationship with Evans is only hinted at. Septimus is not in his right mind to be able to actually and intelligibly think about the relationship they had. It is, however, stated, that Septimus 'drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans [...]'⁸⁰ which is revealing enough. When he is thinking about Evans, he states the following: 'They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other,

⁷⁸ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 62.

⁷⁹ See Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 82.

⁸⁰ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 80.

quarrel with each other.’⁸¹ This is an admirable description of a couple. Furthermore, Evans is the main figure in all of his hallucinations. Someone who means nothing or is simply a friend would not occupy most of his thoughts. According to Septimus, he felt nothing even when Evans died, he did not care. But he felt terrible about that. He expresses more disgust with himself for feeling nothing in this moment than feeling nothing towards his wife and is often thinking about what would happen, if he confessed. This also seems to be heading in the way of hidden homosexuality, which he would like to confess to the world, to his wife. In my opinion, no one would be so absorbed in memories of one person if he did not have strong feelings for them.

4.1.2.2 The influence of homosexuality on his life

Septimus’ life is not influenced as much by his homosexuality as it is by his PTSD and the war itself. However, his close relationship with Evans, which I myself would consider a homosexual relationship considering all the subtle hints Woolf gives, influenced his PTSD a lot, making Evans his one recurring hallucination.

His homoerotic desires have a negative effect on his marriage and overall his relationship with Lucrezia. It is apparent that he has no romantic connection to her, hard to say whether that is the fault of his psychological condition only or whether it is the result of his homosexuality. In my opinion, both are the reason for his failing marriage and his decision to eventually end his life by jumping out of a window and leaving all his troubles behind.

4.1.3 Sally Seton

Sally Seton represents a kind of a mysterious teenage love interest of Clarissa Dalloway. Her personality is only depicted to the reader through Clarissa’s memories.

Sally is a free spirit who goes against all social restrictions. She does not want to succumb to societal expectations, which makes half the people she meets love her and the other half hate her. Sally is representing this controversial person that likes bending the rules and is bewitching people around her. She can be irresistibly charming.

Sally’s charisma swept Clarissa off her feet and this made Sally the impulse for Clarissa’s understanding of her own sexuality. Sally’s breaking of the rules and rejecting social conventions might have its roots in her homosexuality. It is not so clear, whether Sally’s feelings were as strong as Clarissa’s or whether she was just having fun

⁸¹ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 80

and experimenting. Still, Sally eventually married becoming Lady Rosseter and had five sons.

In my opinion, Sally was not really a lesbian. She only liked to be different, stand out in the crowd, liked to be the centre of attention. She fooled Clarissa, because she wanted to claim her attention. Gaining Clarissa's undivided attention and adoration also meant that everyone around Clarissa would be interested.

Another interesting possibility to me is, that Sally is also a character based on a real woman in Woolf's life; Madge Vaughan. This would indicate that Clarissa's and Sally's relationship is based on real life relationship of Woolf and Vaughan. Quentin Bell writes about this in a biography about Woolf's lesbianism. One sentence stands out to me. Woolf supposedly exclaimed: 'Madge is here, at this moment she is actually under this roof.'⁸² This is a sentence almost identical to Clarissa's sentence about Sally: 'She is beneath this roof.... She is beneath this roof!'⁸³ This to me indicates, that Woolf had been thinking about Vaughan when writing Sally's character or at least thinking about her.

4.1.3.2 Her sexuality

Sally's only relationship that is talked about is that with Clarissa and her husbands, which we know nothing about. Her relations with Clarissa seem to me as a mere experiment. Sally is trying to have fun discover something new about her feelings and about herself. It was love from Clarissa's point of view, but not from Sally's.

Furthermore, Sally seems completely content in her married life with her five sons. Clarissa, on the other hand, is not at all happy about her marriage and that is pointing at her real sexuality. From this I deduce, that Sally is not really a lesbian.

4.2 Conclusion to *Mrs Dalloway*

Mrs Dalloway is a book that can be interpreted in many ways. My reading of this book is mainly homosexual. I wanted to pinpoint every homosexual aspect that I was able to unravel, between those the feelings and relationships of main characters. This reading enabled me to find some connection between the book and the author's real-life experience as well, which is supported by Woolf's biography written by Quentin Bell.

⁸² Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf; a biography*, vol. 1 (London: Hogarth Press, 1972), 61.

⁸³ Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 30.

5 ORLANDO: A BIOGRAPHY

To introduce this novel, I am using a quotation from *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*: '[Woolf] reimagines Sackville-West's character and life in the experimental and surrealist novel *Orlando* [...]. Orlando suggests the arbitrariness of gender division, of fixed erotic desires.'⁸⁴ It is mentioned over and over again that *Orlando* is the product of Vita's and Virginia's relationships. It is a romantic declaration of love to Vita. Orlando is actually representing Sackville-West and the reader can notice from the beginning, that many of the passages are an ode to Orlando, thus to Vita.

Even though it is basically a love letter, it is also full of fun. Woolf's desire for fun in writing and literature reflected into this work. She stepped away from psychological writings such as in *Mrs Dalloway* and allowed herself to enjoy the process. The novel was in many ways revolutionary. The portrayal of gender fluidity here is a new and surprising concept. Still, Woolf wrote about it with such ease, that it did not offend anyone.

Virginia Woolf started writing this novel in early October 1927. She first mentions it in her diaries on Wednesday 5 October 1927, thinking about 'a biography beginning the year 1500 and continuing to the present day, called *Orlando: Vita* [...].'⁸⁵ The novel is based on Vita from the first moment Woolf started writing it. Even though she changed the title eventually to *Orlando: A Biography*, the model still stays obvious. She enjoyed the writing of this book thoroughly, calling the time 'a very happy, a singularly happy autumn.'⁸⁶ This book was her reward for all the work she had done until then, mainly for her articles she wrote for magazines.⁸⁷ It seems that she did not have to really think about it, most of it just came naturally to her, which might be what makes the story so fluent. The character easily steps from one century to another, moves from one person to a different one quite simply.

This book contains many surprising passages. Some developments seem to come out of nowhere, many things are quite unexplainable. But neither of these situations ruin the thread of the story. The whole book is simply about the life of Orlando. Whom he meets, what he sees and what he feels over the centuries of his life. Orlando is born as a man and lives as a man until the middle of the story, where he suddenly wakes up as a

⁸⁴ Summers, *The Gay & Lesbian Literary Heritage*, 237.

⁸⁵ Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 237.

⁸⁶ Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 239.

⁸⁷ See Woolf, *Selected Diaries*, 237.

woman. From this time on, Orlando changes her clothes and embarks on her new life, curiously unbothered.

Another important view at *Orlando: A Biography* would be through postmodernism. Postmodernism in literature is often connected with unrealistic or impossible plots, metafiction or suspended endings. That is exactly something we can see in *Orlando* even though the movement itself started many years after *Orlando* was written.

Firstly, the impossible plot. *Orlando* is, of course, about a man, that suddenly wakes up in a woman's body and lives from that moment on as a beautiful girl. Not one person is surprised by this, people do not even seem to realize this sudden change. Except for Orlando in some moments during life, when it is suddenly impossible to do something she did as a man. Also, the story of Orlando is stretching throughout centuries. The reader witnesses Orlando being born as a boy in the 16th century and leaves him in his thirties, as a married woman with children, in 20th century. Orlando lives to see many places, meet hundreds of people, see them be born and see them die. Even though it is sometimes sad, is it not looked at as unnatural. Other characters are not shocked by his long-lasting life. Woolf not only created an unrealistic plot, she connected it with impossible reactions, she made it all seem as something perfectly normal.

Another process typical for postmodernism is metafiction. Metafiction is based on letting the reader know that what he reads is a fiction. In *Orlando*, it is stated many times by the narrator, that the reader is reading a biography and how hard it is to write such a biography. This seems to be another connection to the postmodern writing.

Suspended endings, or the ending of a story when the reader anticipates more, is also present in *Orlando*. We read about Orlando being born, we follow him throughout life, meeting different people and exploring different places, yet the story comes to an end when Orlando is only in mid-thirties. It is corresponding with the biographical part of the story, since Woolf was writing it in Sackville-West thirties, but the reader anticipates following Orlando till the end.

5.1 Biographical elements

Virginia Woolf was able to immortalize Sackville-West, her family background and their love in *Orlando: A Biography* without actually meaning to do so. Vita Sackville-West was aware of Woolf's intentions almost from the beginning since Woolf asked her in one of her letters: "But listen: suppose Orlando turns out to be about Vita; and it's all about you and the lusts of your flesh and the lure of your mind [...]. Shall you mind?"⁸⁸ Fortunately, Vita was not against it and allowed Virginia to write about her and her family history. This led to Vita actually helping Woolf with some aspects, such as letting her choose from some photos of her ancestors to use in the book.⁸⁹ All this had woken up the romance they had between themselves as can be seen from the letter they wrote to one another at that time.

Vita was from an aristocratic family, which is the reason why Orlando was chosen to be a young nobleman from a high-ranking, rich family. Orlando's house which is the centrepiece when it comes to the setting of the novel, is actually based on Vita's birthplace; Knole. This mansion can be linked to Orlando's, because it is, as the one in the novel, said to have 'room for every day of the year, including one with silver furniture.'⁹⁰

In the beginning of the novel, Orlando meets the Princess Marousha Stanilovska Dagmar Nataha Iliana Romanovitch who came with the Muscovites.⁹¹ The Princess, or Sasha, as she is known later in the novel, is from Russia. And during these passages of the two lovers spending time together, Woolf gives great descriptions of Russia and its nature. Woolf got many of these descriptions of the country from Vita herself, since she actually visited Moscow.⁹² This princess is also representing a real person in Vita's life; Violet Trefusis.⁹³ Vita had a scandalous affair with Trefusis that started in the 1918.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Orlando can speak fluent French. Vita was actually the one who translated all the French phrases that Woolf wanted in her book, because she was too, fluent in French.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Victoria Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 181.

⁸⁹ See Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West*, 182.

⁹⁰ See Maev Kennedy, 'Vita Sackville-West's erotic verse to her love emerges from 'intoxicating night,' *The Guardian*. April 29, 2013. Accessed April 13, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/29/sackville-west-lost-poem-lover-trefusis>

⁹¹ See Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2003), 17.

⁹² See Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West*, 172.

⁹³ See Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West*, 203.

⁹⁴ See Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West*, 92.

⁹⁵ See Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West*, 182.

Another character who is inspired by Vita's real-life acquaintance is the Archduchess Harriet, or as we later find out, actually an Archduke that is madly with love with Orlando and begs her to marry him. This can be positively linked to a Lord that proposed to Vita in her early years: 'Lord Lascelles, as the transvestite Archduchess, cuts a ludicrous figure.'⁹⁶ Woolf probably made him absurd deliberately, based on his personality as described by Vita.

Nicholas Greene, as Vita herself states in her letter to her husband Harold, is recognizable as Gosse.⁹⁷ Sir Edmund Gosse was a man of letters, one of the most influential people at his time and Vita's friend. Nicholas Greene, on the other hand, could not be seen as Orlando's friend. In the story, he is also an important writer, a poet. In hope of acquiring some important lessons on writing from him, Orlando invited him to his house, where he stayed for several days. The only outcome from this was a story Greene wrote, ridiculing Orlando. Until they meet again, centuries later.

Last character that can be traced to a real-life companion of Vita is Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. Orlando meets him close to the end of the story and he is actually representing Vita's husband, Sir Harold Nicolson. Unlike Orlando, who married Marmaduke late in her life, Vita married Harold when she was only 21 years old. Marmaduke spent a lot of time abroad 'sailing round Cape Horn'⁹⁸ and Harold travelled a lot around the world too as a British diplomat. Furthermore, Orlando asks herself some important questions, which I also feel have a link to Vita's feelings: 'She was married, true; but if one's husband was always sailing round Cape Horn, was it marriage? If one liked him, was it marriage? If one liked other people, was it marriage?'⁹⁹ She is married, but she has doubts about it all, same as Vita. Both Orlando and Vita have sons, which is also an important biographical touch in the story.

Woolf also used some small details to complete the effect. She mentioned real names: '[...] a few seafaring men, who would sit there trolling their ditties, and telling their stories of Drake, Hawkins, and Greenvile, [...].'¹⁰⁰ These names belong to Elizabethan sea captains and explorers from the 16th century. Another names Woolf

⁹⁶ Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West*, 203.

⁹⁷ See Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West*, 203.

⁹⁸ Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 130.

⁹⁹ Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 130.

¹⁰⁰ Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 27.

integrated into the story are Thomas Browne,¹⁰¹ Christopher Marlowe¹⁰² or Thomas Carlyle.¹⁰³

The whole story, Orlando is working on a poem called 'The Oak Tree'¹⁰⁴ which is actually Vita's poem *The Land*.¹⁰⁵ Woolf even quotes a part of Vita's poem in the book. She also mentions her father's work: 'The true length of a person's life, whatever the *Dictionary of National Biography* may say, is always a matter of dispute.'¹⁰⁶

Woolf puts into the story, sometimes less, but most of the time more obvious connections with her and Vita's real life throughout the whole novel.

5.2 Orlando

Orlando is the only character that we are going to look at. Orlando is an interesting character from the point of view of his/her sexuality and gender fluidity.

Since Orlando is based on Vita Sackville-West, it is interesting that he is initially a man and only later changes into a woman. This might however be explained by Vita's predilection for cross-dressing: 'Sackville-West liked to cross dress, calling herself Julian.'¹⁰⁷ It might have simply been the fact, that she enjoyed cross-dressing. There were, however, many more possibilities for a man than for a woman during those years, so that might have been another factor. This male privilege of the preceding centuries is explored in the book as well. When Orlando wakes up as a woman, thus loses all his male privileges, he has to adjust to his new woman role, realizing everything he cannot do from that moment on.¹⁰⁸

At the beginning, Orlando is a young and wealthy nobleman: 'He – for there could be no doubt of his sex [...].'¹⁰⁹ He is handsome, popular and loved by many. Orlando also seems quite effeminate, emotional and introverted with great love for literature. Because of all this, he has many girls interested in him. Even though he is not in love with any of them, he has relations with most. Until he fell in love for the first

¹⁰¹ See Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 34.

¹⁰² See Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 43.

¹⁰³ See Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 144.

¹⁰⁴ See Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 37.

¹⁰⁵ See Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West*, 203.

¹⁰⁶ Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 151.

¹⁰⁷ Jeanette Winterson, "Different sex. Same person": how Woolf's Orlando became a trans triumph.'

The Guardian. September 3, 2018. Accessed April 15, 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/sep/03/different-sex-same-person-how-woolfs-orlando-became-a-trans-triumph>

¹⁰⁸ See Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 76-77.

¹⁰⁹ Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 5.

time with the Russian princess Sasha. In these days, Orlando is only interested in women and there is no doubt about his sexuality.

This however changes with the change of Orlando's gender. 'Orlando had become a woman there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been.'¹¹⁰ This quotation indicates, that the only changes in Orlando were physical. Even Orlando ignores the change for quite some time and only really grasps the idea some time later.¹¹¹ Since the change was not affecting Orlando's mind, her sexuality should not have been affected either: 'And as all Orlando's loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggard of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved; and if the consciousness of being of the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feeling which she had had as a man.'¹¹² This is an amazing demonstration of Woolf clever writing about homosexuality. There is no possibility one could be blamed by the society for loving a woman in this situation. She is making the public understand the notion of women loving women though Orlando.

But from this time onward, Orlando is interested in men. This raises a question concerning Orlando's sexuality once again. So, Orlando is either bisexual, or she yielded to the societal expectations fairly quickly. Woolf might have written Orlando's interest in men satisfy the society she lived in. Nevertheless, there is an interesting moment when Orlando decides to dress as a man, because she is tired of being a woman and everything that comes with it. This way she met Mistress Nell. Even though their relationship is not specified, it is clear to me, that it was more than a friendship. And as Orlando's biographer states: 'Lovers she had in plenty, [...].'¹¹³

Even though she eventually married a man whom she loved, she never stopped loving Sasha. That is evident since she is still thinking about her after centuries.¹¹⁴

Orlando has gone through many relationships, with men and with women. The change of the gender brought about physical changes, but scarcely any emotional ones. Even though Orlando eventually acquires more feminine behaviour, she cannot change her feelings towards women.

¹¹⁰ Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 67.

¹¹¹ See Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 75.

¹¹² Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 79.

¹¹³ Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 96.

¹¹⁴ See Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, 150.

5.3 Conclusion to *Orlando: A Biography*

My reading of this novel is again homosexual and primarily interested in Orlando's sexuality and how Woolf presents it to the reader. It is important to state, that Woolf did not write *Orlando* with the intention of talking about different sexes. The change of the sex is an important moment and what makes the story so innovative, but the intention is to describe an androgynous mind. Orlando is a character representing what Woolf would like to see in the society. People should not be judging others based on their sexes. Even though *Orlando: A Biography* is mainly a love letter for Vita, it is a ground-breaking novel that supports and clearly, yet circumspectly shows homosexuality, bisexuality and cross-dressing. Orlando's calm acceptance of his gender change and his different love interests to me represents how Woolf wanted the society to view these problems, which I tried to express in the analysis. For the study of *Orlando: A Biography* I used mainly Sackville-West's biography by Victoria Glendinning. This confirmed many of my biographical presumptions about the novel itself.

6 CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis is to show that Virginia Woolf was not simply a lesbian writer but an author that used her own sexuality to write deep and believable characters that struggle in the society as she did. Woolf depicted the naturality of homosexuality through carefully invented characters and stories. It required a lot of courage and ingenuity to create homosexual characters that readers would understand and not get offended by during her time. Woolf lived in a century when homosexuality was still perceived badly, but she decided to fight for it through her literature anyway.

Her goal was not only to write about homosexual characters, but to bring them to life and show the readers the normality of their feelings and desires. Woolf also portrayed unhappiness connected with the inability to be openly in a homosexual relationship in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf's novels are, even after many years, dealing with significant subjects and they convey important messages to the readers even now.

Woolf's usage of biographical elements in *Orlando* even further suggests her own connection to the LGBTQ problematic. She used this novel to show the importance of being able to understand both man and woman. Orlando is a perfectly formed character showing the differences in lives of man and woman, yet the importance of accepting both. Woolf even connected Orlando to another woman when Orlando herself already was a woman, making her bisexual. Woolf was using Orlando and her changes from one sex to another while living through different centuries not to praise one sex or the other, but to show the possibility of an androgynous mind without prejudice.

In order to demonstrate the difficulty to live in a homosexual relationship, I summarized the development of homosexuality in Great Britain. This also shows Woolf's courage to try and portray such characters.

Subsequently, I focused on Woolf's life and relationships, to show the real impulses for creating such stories and characters.

Lastly, I tried to uncover every homosexual or bisexual character and the feelings Woolf hid in them. My goal was to find the clues Woolf concealed for her readers in order to educate them about the matter. I tried to notice every detail in her novels that would point towards Woolf's homosexual writing and different sexualities that she tried to secretly portray. These findings I then conveyed in the analysis of each character.

7 RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje zejména na homosexuální rysy postav v dílech Virginie Woolf. Cílem je ukázat autorku nejen jako lesbickou spisovatelku, nýbrž jako postavu v dějinách, jež výrazně ovlivnila svým dílem vývoj LGBTQ komunity.

Obě rozebíraná díla mají spojitost s vlastním životem autorky, na což se tato práce snaží poukázat a zároveň tak vyzdvihnout autorčinu snahu prezentovat homosexualitu tehdejší kritické společnosti. Stejně tak se tato práce věnuje autorčině schopnosti homosexualitu ukrývat v jednotlivých dílech a postavách a ukazovat ji veřejnosti takovým způsobem, aby nikoho nepohoršila. Postavy, jež autorka vytváří a do nichž promítá, jak se tato práce snaží dokázat, svou vlastní homosexualitu, pak dále poukazují na nešťastné životy těch, kteří musí svou sexualitu skrývat. Jelikož autorka žila a psala v letech, kdy byla homosexualita považována za zločin a tito lidé byli považováni za nemocné, je třeba vyzdvihnout i vynalézavost, s jakou Woolf své postavy prezentovala světu. Autorka nikomu tuto orientaci nenutí ani o ní otevřeně nemluví. Nelze pak žádného čtenáře pohoršit a každý si může pocity dané postavy vyložit po svém.

První část bakalářské práce se zabývá vyložením důležitých pojmů a historických faktů spojených s vývojem homosexuality ve světě a zejména ve Velké Británii. Zmiňuji vývoj homosexuality z právního hlediska až do její legalizace v 60. letech, pohled britské společnosti na homosexualitu. Další podstatnou část tvoří biografie Virginie Woolf a zejména se pak zabývám jejím vztahem s Vitou Sackville-West, která měla největší vliv na vývoj její sexuality.

Ve druhé části práce se věnuji dílům *Paní Dallowayová* a *Orlando*, jež rozebírám z hlediska postav. Soustředím se zejména na postavy, jež jsem při četbě vyhodnotila jako homosexuální a na prvky z jejich života, jež mě k tomuto závěru vedly. V neposlední řadě se snažím jednotlivé situace a pocity propojit s autorčíným životem a vytvořit tak spojení mezi životními osudy Woolf a jejích postav.

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Klíčová slova: Virginie Woolf, *Paní Dallowayová*, *Orlando*, homosexualita, lesbicismus

Charakteristika: Tato práce se zabývá tématem homosexuality v dílech Virginie Woolfové. Teoretická část představuje pojem homosexuality a jejího vnímání v dané době, poté se bude věnovat homosexualitě samotné autorky a jejího pohledu na danou problematiku. Stěžejní částí práce bude analýza autorčiných románů *Paní Dallowayová* a životopisného románu *Orlando* z hlediska vyobrazení homosexuality postav. V rámci jednotlivých kapitol práce postupně zkoumá postavy spojené s touto tematikou. Práce se věnuje vývoji homosexuality v dané době a v autorčině životě, zejména pak snaze autorky poukázat na existenci homosexuality ve světle tehdejšího veskrze negativního společenského konsensu.