

**The Representation of Gender in Virginia Woolf's
Orlando and Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex***

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Abstract

This thesis presents an exploration of the representation of gender in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* mainly in light of the theories of Judith Butler. The focus will be on how the two novels challenge the traditional concept of gender and gender categories, and in what ways the novels can give us new perspectives on the concept of gender. The theoretical focus will be on Judith Butler, more precisely her idea of gender as performance, and her deconstructionist approach to identity categories. I will present Butler's proposal for a "new feminist genealogy," and through my investigation of the representation of gender in *Orlando* and *Middlesex* I will show how both novels take on a "Butlerian" understanding of the concept of gender.

By looking at various issues related to gender explored in the two novels, and pointing to similarities and differences between the two works, I hope to show how the protagonists, Orlando and Cal/lie, break down and transcend the fraught categories of male and female, thus disrupting the traditional gender norms and conventions, showing them to be socially and culturally constructed. Judith Butler's hope is for every human being to be acknowledged as a subject, no matter which gender and/or sexual identity he or she has, and my aim is consequently to present how *Orlando* and *Middlesex*, through their representation of gender, open up for a greater understanding and broader acceptance for every individual.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

I have always been fascinated by how literature can make ordinary characters seem extraordinary, and yet, at the same time, how it can make extraordinary characters seem like you and me. I think it is this feature that attracted me with regard to both Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*¹ and Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*.² The two novels guide us through the everyday life of their protagonists, Orlando and Cal/lie, working almost as fictional biographies, at the same time as they present us with the complexities of not being like everyone else. It is this balance between creating a character one can relate to, at the same time as this character is *other* to us readers, that in my opinion makes these two novels so powerful. Both novels deal with a central question we all strive to answer in life: who am I and how do I want to live my life? The concept of identity is explored in two completely different settings by two completely different authors, but yet they touch upon many of the same essential themes. How do we as human beings place ourselves in society, and to what extent are we free to decide who we want to be, and to what extent is our identity determined by biology, and to what extent is it constructed by the political, cultural and social discourse of which we are a part?

In this thesis, my focus will be on one central aspect of an individual's identity, namely one's gender. When reading fiction, I have seldom spent much time analyzing the gender of the characters; they are simply just either female or male. Of course, a person's gender is often important for a novel's plot or for the development of the character, but it is still something that simply exists, as *either/or*. Certain features apply to the category of female, and certain features apply to the category of male. I have never spent much time questioning *why* this and that signifies femaleness, and *why* this and that signifies maleness, and *who* it is that decides this. With *Orlando* and *Middlesex* my understanding of gender, both in literature and in life itself, changed. The two novels forced me to stop and think about how I define gender, and how I define people according to their gender, and finally, how I view

¹ Virginia Woolf. *Orlando*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. All my references are to this edition, and the page numbers have been placed within parenthesis in the text itself throughout the thesis.

² Jeffrey Eugenides. *Middlesex*. London: Bloomsbury, 2002. All my references are to this edition, and the page numbers have been placed within parenthesis in the text itself throughout the thesis.

people that cannot instantly be placed in the category of male *or* the category of female. When reading the two novels, it was as if I suddenly experienced the painful existence of not fitting in, of not belonging to either of the categories society has put up for us. Luckily for me, this experience was limited to my reading process, and not to how I saw myself in real life, but still, it made me think: what if I were the one who did not fit in? Dwelling on this thought and the concept of gender presented in the two novels, I became interested in alternative ways one could define gender, ways that perhaps could promote a greater understanding and acceptance for those not fitting into the *either/or* categories of male and female now available. Following these thoughts led me to the work of Judith Butler and the concept of gender performance, and I discovered that it was in fact someone who had worked out alternative ways to look at gender and the construction of gender categories. I realized that Butler's ideas could very well be explored both in relation to *Orlando* and *Middlesex*, as each novel presents an implicit critique of the traditional concept of gender.

Consequently, in this thesis I will look at how gender is portrayed in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and in Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*, and how the two novels' representation of gender can be seen in relation to Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance, and her proposal for a "new feminist genealogy." I will prove how both novels, in light of Butler's theories, possess a critique of the fraught categories of gender, and how the concept of performativity can serve as a resistance against the heteronormative system of gender categorization. In this chapter, I will establish a theoretical groundwork for the textual analysis to come, and, of course, present Judith Butler and her theories of gender and gender identity. Further, I will also give a brief introduction to some of the theoretical schools and figures by which she has been influenced and inspired, and spend some time defining an essential concept, namely performativity, as well as Butler's view on the construction of the subject. As indicated above, chapters two and three will focus on one novel each and their treatment of gender, mainly in light of Butler's theories. Chapter two will focus on *Orlando*, and chapter three on *Middlesex*, followed by a conclusion that presents the issues explored in the first three chapters.

Background: *Orlando* and *Middlesex*

Both *Orlando* and *Middlesex* have previously been read in light of feminist theory, and especially *Orlando* has attracted a wide range of analyses from a feminist viewpoint. Virginia Woolf is perhaps one of our most discussed writers, and to say something about her work that has not already been said can thus be a challenge. I hope, however, that through the use of Judith Butler's ideas on gender, and further through seeing *Orlando* as similar to a, in theory, completely different novel, I will bring in some new perspectives on the portrayal of gender in Woolf's famous work. In my discussion of *Orlando* I will of course use the theories of Judith Butler, especially in relation to my exploration of gender performance in the novel. I will, however, also pay attention to Woolf's concept of androgyny as she presents it in her own text *A Room of Ones Own*, and in that connection I will include perspectives from various critics' view on Woolf and androgyny, such as Marilyn R. Farwell, Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Karen Kaivola and Sarah Hastings, to mention a few. Additionally, Woolf's relationship to feminism will be discussed using Laura Marcus's essay "Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf," and further Sandra M. Gilbert's introduction to the Penguin edition of *Orlando* has provided me with useful background information both on Woolf as a person, and on *Orlando* in particular.

Middlesex, on the other hand, has not yet developed the same amount of criticism as *Orlando*, which is only natural considering that it was published seventy-four years later. The theoretical work existing on *Middlesex* is mainly dealing with identity politics, both in terms of ethnicity and gender, and the texts that focus on gender are primarily concerned about whether *Middlesex* challenges heteronormativity or not. In my discussion of the novel's portrayal of gender I will thus include ideas from for instance Elizabeth Piastra, Deborah Shostak and Rachel Carroll who presents different view points on *Middlesex*'s representation of gender and gender categories. Further, in my exploration of Cal/lie's hermaphroditism I will use Anne Fausto-Sterling's book *Sexing the Body*, as well as an example of the consequences of genital surgery presented by Susan Frelich Appleton. My main theoretical focus will, however, be Judith Butler, and I hope to present a discussion of the representation of gender in *Middlesex* that will deal with issues not looked at before, and thus be a valuable contribution to the growing amount of critical work on the novel. By using Butler's theories, and by drawing lines between the two novels,

both finding similarities and differences in their treatment of gender, I hope to present some new and original viewpoints, and further I hope to show how both novels can help us look differently at the concept of gender, and its relation to society, culture, politics and the individual.

First of all, I will start with a brief introduction to each of the primary works on which the analysis in this thesis will be based. At first I was uncertain whether it was a good idea to focus on two novels coming from so completely different periods, and I know that it will be a challenge to investigate their exploration of the same theme, and still keep their different origins in mind. To write about gender identity in early 20th century England, and to write about gender identity in early 21st century America are two completely different projects. Therefore, I will now present the novels, their authors and the period in which they were written in order to establish a framework within which one can better understand the two works.

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*

I have always been fascinated by Virginia Woolf, not only because of her talent in creating fiction, but also because of her sharp critical tongue, and her thoughts around the challenges of being a *female* writer. The modernity of both her literary texts and her critical thinking is quite extraordinary to me, and *Orlando* can definitely be characterized as one of her most remarkable works. When I first read *Orlando*, I was surprised by how it completely broke with the literary conventions of Virginia Woolf's present time. Part mock-biography, part homage to Woolf's good friend Vita Sackville-West, Woolf played with the conventions of biography as a genre, and blurred the lines between fantasy and reality. Even though the story of Orlando may have been inspired by real life events, the novel includes elements that very well show that this could not be a true story, following Woolf's statement that *Orlando* should be "truthful but fantastic" (Gilbert xxv). Virginia Woolf's representation of the concept of time in the novel is one of these fantastic elements. The protagonist Orlando lives through centuries, and thus Woolf is able to give an account of not just an individual's life, but also a presentation of British history, and how the changing times influence the individual over a longer period.

The other element Woolf plays with - and perhaps more controversial at that time - is the concept of gender. Woolf simply allows her protagonist to go from male to female halfway through the novel, without further explanation. The novel starts off in the sixteenth century with the young nobleman Orlando, striving with love and the art of writing. To escape a clinging lover, Orlando flees to Turkey where he works as an ambassador, and where he, after a several days long sleep, wakes up to find himself turned into a woman. As a woman, Orlando lives with a gypsy community for a while, before returning to England where she gradually becomes accustomed to her female identity, and, reaching the reign of Queen Victoria, gets married and has a child. In many ways, Orlando is quite normal: he/she struggles with life, love, a career and, the changing demands of society, but at the same time, Orlando is nothing like you and me: he/she experiences both being male and female: he/she lives through centuries, and he/she meets some rather unique characters. I will of course come back to specific events and characters in Orlando's life in the chapter to come, but at this point I will just try to explain under which circumstances Woolf produced this remarkable work of fiction.

The innovativeness of Woolf's work was indeed quite extraordinary at her time, and it is perhaps shocking that Woolf could write about gender and sexuality as she did, but one must not forget that she belonged to a rather open-minded group of friends, the Bloomsbury Group. In her introduction to *Orlando*, Sandra M. Gilbert quotes critic Alex Zwerdling describing the liberal nature of the Bloomsbury Group:

Homosexuality and lesbianism not only practiced but openly discussed; adulterous liaisons becoming an accepted part of the family circle; *menages a trois, a quatre, a cinq*; and all this happening shortly after the death of Queen Victoria, among people raised by the old rules (Gilbert xv).

England was definitely going through times of change after Queen Victoria's death, and, as Zwerdling hints in the above quote, there emerged a split between old and new ways of living: people clinging to the traditional Victorian values, as opposed to others who adapted a more modern and liberal life style. Virginia Woolf placed herself in the latter category, surrounded by family and friends belonging to the intellectual and artistic sphere of early 20th century London; she wrote in an environment where experimental and controversial texts were encouraged. In fact, *Orlando* was warmly welcomed by contemporary critics as well, exclaiming that

“never, perhaps, has Mrs. Woolf written with more verve: certainly she has never imagined more boldly” (Gilbert xxxiv). This remark from *The Times Literary Supplement* praises Woolf’s imagination, and precisely that *Orlando*’s plot is so imaginary, so unrealistic, made it perhaps more acceptable in its own time.

As the field of feminist criticism has developed tremendously since Woolf’s own contributions, *Orlando* has become an even more important novel. To see Woolf’s fiction in light of, as I will in this thesis, Judith Butler’s gender theory certainly proves the modernity and controversial nature of *Orlando*. It is undoubtedly remarkable that Woolf could create a novel that so easily can be linked to ideas presented over fifty years later, something I will show when returning to *Orlando* in more detail in chapter two.

Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*

Jeffrey Eugenides’s novel *Middlesex* was created under quite different, and arguably more liberal, circumstances, but still, the issues explored are just as controversial in Eugenides’s and our present time. In many ways *Middlesex* is a stereotypical *Bildungsroman* as we follow the protagonist’s development from early childhood (in fact from birth, or even from conception), and into becoming a mature individual. It is an epic saga that takes the reader from the small island of Smyrna in 1922, through the race riots in Detroit via the fashionable neighborhood of Grosse Pointe, and finally ending up in the multicultural quarters of today’s eastern part of Berlin. It does indeed sound like a typical coming-of-age story, but the ambiguous gender identity of the protagonist Cal/lie makes *Middlesex* a coming-of-age story out of the ordinary. Although *Middlesex*’s Cal/lie does not live through as many centuries as Woolf’s Orlando, Eugenides also presents a tale not just of an individual, but of a longer period in history and of how the individual is a product of its era, and further he shows how one’s life can be affected by choices made long before one was born.

By the time of *Middlesex*’s publication in 2002, feminist criticism had grown into an acknowledged academic field with numerous and diverse contributors. Still, Eugenides’s story is perhaps just as controversial as Woolf’s as he writes about a condition, that is hermaphroditism, we know exists, but which is still considered a taboo. *Middlesex*’s protagonist Cal/lie has been raised as a girl, and believes herself to

be a girl, until she reaches puberty, and painfully discovers that she is not like everyone else. Through her sexual awakening as a teenage girl and, following this, the discovery of her true biological situation, female Callie chooses to become male Cal.

The silenced condition of hermaphroditism, which I will come back to in more detail when exploring *Middlesex* in chapter three, shows that we still have a long way to go in accepting those who fall outside of the traditional gender categories of male and female. As opposed to Woolf's *Orlando* which is a mere fantasy, though a controversial one, Eugenides's story could easily have been about a real person, and that is what makes it so powerful. Additionally, Cal/lie challenges the gender categories in a different way than Orlando. While Orlando shifts between the category of male and that of female, Cal/lie, being a hermaphrodite, inhabits an existence *in between* the two gender categories. In fact, the very title of the novel hints to Cal/lie's position between, in the middle of, the two sexes, as well as referring to the house in which Callie lives through puberty. The novel also sheds light on the relationship between nature and nurture in determining gender; Cal/lie is raised as a girl, but biologically he/she is more male than female. Cal's choice to live as a male, although being brought up as female Callie, suggests that Eugenides sees the biological implications of gender as more important than the cultural, but as we will see in chapter three, *Middlesex* presents a rather complex view on gender, and the construction of gender identity.

In all its aspects, *Middlesex* shows signs of being created in a postmodern and globalized environment. Eugenides himself is a third generation immigrant (like Cal/lie) of Greek and Irish decent, and he has lived in both India and Berlin (Brown online). The novel portrays a world where previously stable identity categories, such as gender and ethnicity, are undergoing a process of changing and are consequently becoming much more fluid, and precisely the break down of categories is a key issue explored in *Middlesex*. Eugenides's novel shows how Cal/lie struggles to position him/herself in this constantly changing world, and how he/she strives to be recognized as what Butler calls an "intelligible subject." Further, Eugenides presents a conflict between an individual's need to be accepted by society, and an individual's need to accept him/herself. The postmodern view of the processual and ever-changing subject, and the subject as a product of the existing discourse surrounding it, is present both in Judith Butler's theories and in Eugenides's portrayal of Cal/lie,

something I will come back to in more detail when returning to *Middlesex* in chapter three.

Background: Judith Butler

Having now contextualized the novels that will be analyzed in the chapters to come, it is time to present the theories on which I will base my analysis. As already alluded to, my primary theoretical basis will be Judith Butler and, particularly, her ideas of gender as performance, her critique of fraught gender categories, and her proposal for a “new feminist genealogy.” I will thus dedicate the rest of this chapter to this topic, and through my exploration of Butler’s theories, I also wish to map out where she comes from, meaning by whom and what her ideas have been inspired, which theoretical schools she is said to belong to, and some of the central concepts frequently encountered in her works.

The main theoretical focus will be on Judith Butler’s own texts, and especially on *Gender Trouble* which includes both Butler’s critique of feminist criticism’s status quo and her ideas of gender as performance. I will however also pay attention to Butler’s essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” as well as her exploration of the process of becoming a subject as presented in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. In order to get a better understanding of Butler’s ideas I will also turn to some secondary sources exploring Butler, such as Gill Jagger’s *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics, Social Change and the Power of the Performative*, and Anita Brady and Tony Schirato’s *Understanding Judith Butler*, as well as Sara Salih’s introduction to *The Judith Butler Reader*. In my exploration of the concept of performativity in general I have found valuable information in *Performance Studies: An Introduction* by Richard Schechner, and further Louis Althusser’s essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)” has given me an interesting perspective on the creation of the subject.

Butler and Feminist Criticism

First of all, to place Butler in an academic tradition or theoretical field is hard, if not impossible. In *The Judith Butler Reader*, editor Sara Salih states that, “to call Butler a poststructuralist (or a postmodernist – a label she does not consider appropriate) would elide the feminist, psychoanalytic, and Marxist frameworks within which her work is also located” (5), illustrating Butler’s manifold theoretical background. Her works cover various fields, but she is most famous for her contributions to feminist criticism and queer theory, with *Gender Trouble* regarded as her most important text; hence I will start by placing Butler in the field of feminist criticism. Although Butler in *Gender Trouble* presents a rather sharp critique of the status quo of feminist theory she has unarguably been influenced by some of its contributors as well. Butler proposes a *new* type of feminist criticism, a “genealogical critique,” but in order to understand what she means with this new type we need to take a look at what she questions with the old one.

Against Feminist Criticism’s Status Quo

The first chapter of *Gender Trouble* includes a presentation of two prominent feminist critics, Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray, theoreticians Butler both draws on and rejects. Butler’s understanding of gender fits very well with the famous mantra from Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 295). Beauvoir and Butler seem to share the understanding that gender is not determined from birth, but rather constructed through a temporal process. Beauvoir’s thoughts as presented in *The Second Sex* are, however, largely based on dichotomies, where male and female are two separate categories, and where the category of female is seen as subordinated, and thus takes the position as the Other. Butler criticizes Beauvoir, and feminist criticism in general, for being too concerned with categories, and especially, opposing categories, where the category of female traditionally has been ranked as subordinate to the category of male. Butler claims that instead of protesting against an unfair categorization, one must look at *how* these categories are constructed, and *why* it is that one category is ranked higher than another, and more importantly, why there are so many that do not fit into either of these categories.

Following this critique, Butler argues that the category of women is in fact defined inside the heterosexual matrix, and thus “the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation” (*Gender Trouble* 3). Butler demonstrates the impossibility of escaping the political system of categorization, and in *Understanding Judith Butler*, Anita Brady and Tony Schirato explain that “any imagining outside of that field of power is an effect of power, a fantasy of agency that only serves to reaffirm what it would ostensibly oppose” (42). Through this, Butler reveals the paradox of how feminist criticism is trying to resist a system by which it is constituted as a category, and by which women are constituted as subjects, and instead she asks for a resistance from *within* that system, meaning that one needs to question the categorization, rather than escaping it. Consequently, the task is, according to Butler, to rethink the “possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself” (*Gender Trouble* 42).

As opposed to Beauvoir who argues that women are defined in opposition, and as subordinate, to men, Irigaray claims that women constitute a category that cannot be represented *at all*. Irigaray states that “both the subject and the Other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that achieves its totalizing goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 13). Thus, for Irigaray the Other, or the category of female is defined within a masculine and phallogocentric discourse, and consequently the feminine has no language of its own. It is clear that Butler, with her critique of a masculinist signifying economy is influenced by Irigaray, but additionally Butler underlines the importance of remaining “self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism.” This she explains by the fact that the “effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms” (*Gender Trouble* 18). Consequently, to remain stuck in the black and white categories of a masculinist signifying economy on the one hand, and a feminist criticism opposing it on the other hand, will not result in new ways of looking at gender and the construction of gender categories.

Questioning Categorization and the Division of Sex and Gender

As already mentioned, one of the main problems of the status quo of feminist criticism is, according to Butler, the obsession with categorization, and the need to define women as a single category. Butler argues that to think of women as a single category is to reduce the multiplicity of gender identities to a limited concept in which few will fit in. Butler expresses that it is “time to entertain a radical critique that seeks to free feminist theory from the necessity of having to construct a single or abiding ground” (*Gender Trouble* 7). As explored above, it is however important to note that Butler does not propose that we step outside of the gender categories (that is not possible), but that we need to reflect on how these categories are produced, and why it is that two gender categories are considered as intelligible, and others not. What and who decide who shall be recognized as subjects? I will come back to how Butler defines the subject, and the process of becoming a subject later in this chapter, but for now it is important to note that she sees the subject not as a fixed entity, but rather as something that is temporarily constructed by the discourse of which that particular subject is a member.

Finally, Butler criticizes the traditional division of gender and sex as two separate concepts. According to Butler, this division helps keep the binary gender system intact, and should thus be rejected. Butler argues that the concept of sex could not be thought of as prior to that of gender because they are both products of social, cultural and political factors. It is, however, an obvious physical difference between men and women, namely the appearance of the genitals, but nevertheless this difference only come to have meaning through a social, cultural, and political discourse. Butler’s argumentation for the merging of sex and gender can be a bit difficult to grasp, but in *Understanding Judith Butler*, Anita Brady and Tony Schirato present Butler’s arguments, for instance that, “sex as a material or embodied difference between male and female only has meaning within the cultural framework that in the sex/gender distinction it is otherwise imagined to precede” (34). In practice, I read it as something like this: when a baby is born and the doctor exclaims “it is a girl” or “it is a boy,” he can only do that because there already exist certain notions of what it means to be a girl or a boy. Although the baby is hailed as male or female according to the genital’s appearance, the *meaning* of having these specific

genitals is understood within a gendered framework that are socially constructed.

Butler argues that,

Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts (*Gender Trouble* 10).

Brady and Schirato state that, according to Butler, "sex is sexual difference (the distinction between men and women) but it is sexual difference understood as a discursively produced organizing framework" (37). Of course there is a physical difference between men and women, but it is only through the cultural discourse of gender that this difference has meaning. Further, as Butler argues, the belief that sex exists prior to gender upheld the binary structure: "it is already clear that one way the internal stability and binary frame for sex is effectively secured is by casting the duality of sex in a prediscursive domain" (*Gender Trouble* 10). It is through the belief that sex exists prior to the social, cultural, and political discourse that makes it visible, that the fraught gender categorization is upheld, and thus a starting point for deconstructing this categorization is to reveal that "sex itself is a gendered category" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 10).

A Genealogical Critique

Butler labels her project "a genealogical critique," and in Brady and Schirato's words that means an "enquiry into, and critique of, the terms by which the category of women comes to have any currency as a meaningful cultural category" (30). Butler's genealogical critique is based on a "foucauldian," which I will come back to in more detail later, understanding of the mechanisms of power and knowledge, and how the interplay between these two concepts produces both the institution, and the means by which it circulates as universal, for example how the norm of heterosexuality is constantly reinforcing itself (Brady, Schirato 31). Butler's aim with this critique is, in Gill Jagger's words, to "show that identity categories are fictional products of these regimes of power/knowledge or power/discourse rather than natural effects of the body" (17). Butler wants to reveal the illusion of the original, showing that "these apparently foundational categories are actually cultural products that create the effect of the natural, the original, the inevitable" (Jagger 18). A key concept in Butler's idea

of the illusion of the original is the concept of performativity. Through showing that gender is indeed a performance, something one does, rather than something one is, she wants to reveal the very constructedness of gender categories. I will thus in the paragraphs to come focus on performativity, first the concept of performativity in general, and then I will turn to Butler and her idea of gender as performance.

Performativity

I have tried, by placing Butler in the tradition of feminist criticism, to map out her project of a feminist genealogical critique. To get a deeper insight into Butler's theory of gender as performance, however, I will look at the concept of performativity, and different theoretical schools it has been associated with. This will automatically enable me to draw out an overview of some of Butler's own inspirations, and to get a better understanding of her thoughts around the concept of performativity.

Central to my investigation of gender in *Orlando* and *Middlesex* are the concept of performativity and gender as performance, but what exactly is performativity? For many the word performativity, and especially, performance are associated with something theatrical, something you do on stage in front of a crowd. To understand the concept of performance in relation to gender one must step away from the exclusively theatrical aspect of the term. In this thesis I will follow Richard Schechner's description of the performative as presented in *Performance Studies: An Introduction*: performative is "something that is like 'a performance' without actually being a performance in the orthodox or formal sense" (110). What this exactly means, can be hard to pin down, and I will try to make it a bit clearer in the following paragraphs.

Performative Speech-Acts and Derrida's Deconstructionism

The concept of performativity used in this thesis builds on a tradition that started with linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin and his speech-act theories determining that a specific use of language is performance (linguistic performativity). In *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin presented what he saw as a difference between

performative and non-performative speech-acts. The performative speech-acts are different from the non-performative in that they do not describe or represent something, they are simply actions, following the idea that “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (Austin 6). Examples of such speech-acts are for instance the stating of “I do” during a wedding ceremony, which is both an utterance and an act. As opposed to these “real” performative speech-acts, Austin defines speech-acts performed by actors on stage as “parasitic [...] etiolations of language” (22), signaling that these utterances are only imitations of original speech-acts.

Austin’s speech-act theory was, however, criticized by Jacques Derrida, one of the leading figures of deconstructionism and a great influence on the works of Judith Butler. In opposition to Austin, Derrida argues that in fact “all utterances are infelicitous” (Schechner 111). For a deconstructionist, there is no such thing as an essence, something that is prior to everything else. This view applies to language as well, and thus “one cannot determine a set of rules of primary linguistic acts and then give the rules for deriving the other, secondary, linguistic acts from them” (Halion online). For Derrida it does not make sense to define one thing as the original, the normal, and then another as parasitic, because “contexts cannot be fixed and thus putatively normal utterances can be read in contexts which make them parasitic” (Halion online). Consequently,

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in small or large units, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring (Schechner 126).

It is the deconstructionistic critique of the philosophical belief in a center that is underlying and outside the system of investigation that is relevant for the concept of performativity. For Derrida, this system of investigation is language, and he argues that there is no such thing as a secure ground or structure behind language, for that is a mere “philosophical fiction” (Lodge, Wood 211). Derrida’s deconstructionism seeks to pick apart, and break down the components of a system, for instance language, and by breaking it down to its separate components, deconstructionism exposes the

oppositions, and hierarchies within that system, and shows that there is no underlying structure or essence (Lothe, Refsum, Solberg 35).

Just as Derrida, by deconstructing language as a system, reveals that there is no universal structure behind language, Butler, by viewing gender as performance, and by pointing at the separate acts that make up a gender identity, reveals the illusion of the existence of a stable gender identity. The stable categories of male and female are reinforced and upheld by the belief in binary oppositions, a belief closely associated with the metaphysics of Western philosophy. Both a deconstructionistic approach and the concept of performativity, on the other hand, seek to break down traditional power structures and hierarchies. The performative possesses processual and temporal qualities that signalize development, and constant movement, something that challenges the concept of a stable center.

Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism

Even though I want to be careful in putting a label on Butler's gender theory, one can easily pin down some of her theoretical influences. As well as Derrida and his theory of deconstruction as I presented above, Butler's work is also influenced by post-structuralism in general, and, especially, Michel Foucault. Post-structuralism proposes an overall critique of western philosophy's metaphysics, and the division of the world into binary oppositions, and is used as a collective term under which for instance deconstructionism can be placed. Further, like Derrida's theory of deconstruction, post-structuralists in general reject essentialism, and are rather focusing on temporal changes and development. It is especially a post-structuralist understanding of the subject that is relevant for Butler's theory, which involves the idea of a processual subject, and a radical criticism of fraught identity categories.

Post-structuralism is, as the name indicates, partly a continuation of, partly a break with, the ideas of structuralism. Structuralist thinkers believed that for instance language, and hence literature, were based on universal structures, and thus they wanted to promote a universal model for understanding language and texts. Post-structuralists, however, rejected the universalism of structuralism that they meant "reduced complex situations to over-simplified models" (Schechner 124). Post-structuralists regard "each phenomenon as part of an endless stream of repetitions

with no ‘first voice’ of ultimate authority” (Schechner 124). Butler’s concept of gender as performance is influenced by post-structuralist thinking as it builds on the idea that repeated acts, that is phenomena as part of an endless stream of repetition, make up a gender identity, and further that there is no original or absolute female or male identity behind these acts: no “first voice” of ultimate authority.

The idea of performativity can also be seen in relation to the postmodern society and a globalised world where the subject has become an increasingly fluid concept. This connection is explored by Richard Schechner who writes:

One of the decisive qualities of postmodernism is the application of the ‘performance principle’ to all aspects of social and artistic life. Performance is no longer confined to the stage, to the arts, and to ritual (114).

Schechner argues that postmodernism is characterized by an attack on the master narratives of modernism: “the nation-state, natural law, rational logic, patriarchal authority, mandatory coherence, and beginning-middle-and-end stories,” (116) which indicates a strong opposition to absolute truths, regulating institutions, and restrictions of the individual. Indeed, Schechner links the postmodern with the theory of deconstruction and the ideas of post-structuralism, seeing them as the academic responses to a postmodern world.

As explored above, Butler has been influenced by post-structuralism, especially Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, feminist criticism, and also by thinking and existing in a postmodern environment. What is important to note in relation to performativity in particular is how the ideas explored above have influenced Butler’s view on the subject as processual, and ever-changing, and consequently her criticism of fraught identity categories. Gill Jagger describes Butler’s account of performativity as,

An attempt to theorize subjectivity in a way that locates the formation of the subject in history and culture, rejecting the notion of the universal, transcendental subject, and the gender hierarchy on which it is based (36).

Butler’s subject is formed in and through society, and is thus not absolute. As for Butler’s rejection of the gender hierarchy in particular, I will now turn to her presentation of gender as performance.

Gender as Performance

Having looked at performance in general and touched briefly upon Butler's concept of performativity, I will now look into gender as performance in more depth in the paragraphs to come. In short, Butler views gender as something one *does*, rather than something one *is*. She claims that "gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always doing, though not doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (*Gender Trouble* 34). It is hence what we *do* that creates our gender identity, and not the other way around: gender does not exist prior to the acts that establish it. Consequently, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 34). In other words: "gender is a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 522). Further, the acts of gender are a temporal process, and the repetition of these acts is what creates the reproduction of identities, and makes them appear natural. Butler explains how "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (*Gender Trouble* xv). We learn to perform our gender through repeated acts from a very early age and thus our gender performance becomes naturalized to such an extent that gender is believed to be biologically, rather than culturally and socially, constructed. What is important to note, however, is that the gender performance of Butler is not a performance in the theatrical sense of the word; "it is not an action that is done by a volitional agent who is free to select her/his gender 'styles'" (Salih 91). Consequently, we do not wake up every morning choosing which gender to do as we choose our clothes, rather we, as subjects, are "'done' by gender [...], the actor is done by those acts!" (Salih 91). But as the gender performance is not chosen freely by its actor, who is it that decides what our gender performance should be like?

Brady and Schirato describe how Butler sees gender as a "culturally sanctioned performance, a requirement that a body coheres, and continues to cohere, according to certain norms of intelligibility" (45). Further, Butler continues describing how one can view the act of gender as an act that has been going on before the actor

arrived on the scene: “gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 526). The script would thus be the gender norms, created by the political, social and cultural discourse in which we exist. Additionally, Brady and Schirato explain how,

Every performance of gender is required by the histories of gender intelligibility to cite the norms that precede and produce it, and that the ongoing requirement of gender performance requires the ongoing and repeated citations of those norms (48).

We are born into a world where there exist norms for what is considered as intelligible genders, and thus we perform our gender in accordance with these norms because we believe them to be natural and absolute features of that gender to which we belong.

Intelligible and Unintelligible Genders: Potential for Resistance

These existing norms that make up the “script” for gender performance produce what Butler calls intelligible genders which she defines as “those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (*Gender Trouble* 23). For instance, the existing gender norms promote heteronormativity and uphold heterosexuality as the preferred sexual orientation. To have an idea of what is considered as intelligible genders, however, it needs to be something that is viewed as unintelligible. Butler claims that the very existence of an intelligible gender identity “requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’ – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender” (*Gender Trouble* 24). These identities could thus be individuals one cannot instantly place in the category of male or in the category of female, such as drag artists or butch lesbians, or individuals with sexual desires not fitting the norm of heterosexuality, such as homosexuals. Unintelligible gender identities have a history of being sanctioned, either literally through physical punishment or by social ostracism. Butler describes how “performing one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an

essentialism of gender identity after all” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 528). The fear of falling outside the category of intelligible genders, that is not being a heterosexual male or female, reinforces the existing gender norms and the fraught gender categories, as people choose to conform to these categories rather than experiencing being socially excluded.

Butler does, however, argue that it is in these unintelligible genders that the potential for resistance lies because these “unintelligible bodies” reveal heterosexuality as a fictional construction. Precisely because gender is a performance, and a performance of a temporal character, meaning that a gender identity is created through the repetition of acts over time, there is space and possibility for change. Gender is an act, and thus it can be changed. Butler explains how,

Possibilities of transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 520).

The perhaps most famous example of gender performance as resistance is the cross-dressing drag artist Butler presents in *Gender Trouble*. Even though drag artists are performing gender in the literal sense of the word, their performance “makes fun” of the notion that there is such a thing as an original and absolute gender identity. Drag artists perform a critique through parody by exaggerating stereotypical features of gender identity, showing that in fact “all” genders are performances, and that there is no such thing as true or false when it comes to gender. Butler states that “in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself” (*Gender Trouble* 187). It is, however, important to note that cross-dressing and drag performances are not the only possibilities for resistance through performance, but as Butler explains, “drag is an example that is meant to establish that ‘reality’ is not as fixed as we generally assume it to be” (*Gender Trouble* xxv). Other ways of resistance can be of a more moderate character, for instance being openly homosexual or acknowledging the existence of intersexuals.

A Political Project

Gill Jagger describes how Butler sees the possibility for change “through repetitions that subvert dominant gender norms in the hope of destabilizing and displacing these

regimes” (Jagger 34). This, as with gender performance in general, is a temporal process, and a process that already has been going on for a while, which is evident in for instance the increased rights for homosexuals in society. Butler has stated in an interview that gender performativity is “the slow and difficult practice of producing new possibilities of experiencing gender in the light of history, and in the context of very powerful norms that restrict our intelligibility as human beings” (Birulés online). This indicates that Butler’s genealogical critique and concept of gender performance are very much a political project. It is an attempt to focus on those falling outside the existing discourse, and further to understand why and how this can happen, and finally find a way to gain recognition for these unintelligible individuals. As she states herself, her work revolves around the question of “what kind of life is worth protecting and what kind of life is not?” (Birulés online). Butler’s project, as described by Sara Salih in her introduction to *The Judith Butler Reader*, is,

A fundamental commitment to extend and expand the category of “the human,” so that subjects who do not conform to its hetero-normative, racialized imperatives need no longer suffer the violence of social exclusion (3).

Through this, Butler seeks to transform “the delimiting power structures which currently prescribe what counts as ‘human’” (Salih 3). By deconstructing the power hierarchies that produce the norms for what is considered as intelligible, Butler wants to prove that these norms are culturally, socially, and politically constructed, and not absolute or natural. To sum up, her theories build on a hope for a broader understanding and acceptance for all human beings: her wish is for everyone to be able to “consider that one’s life is possible and viable, so that one is permitted to exist and to operate freely in public spaces with all the attendant norms of recognition” (Salih 11). It is precisely this human aspect of her ideas that makes her work so important and valuable.

The Production of the Subject

As explored above, Butler’s focus is very much on *how* and by *whom* subjects are constructed, and further *why* some are rendered as intelligible subjects and some not. In her exploration of the subject’s creation, Butler draws on Michel Foucault’s idea

about how “juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent” (*Gender Trouble* 3). Butler claims that “juridical subjects are invariably produced through certain exclusionary practices that do not ‘show’ once the juridical structure of politics has been established” (*Gender Trouble* 3). For Foucault, the subject is produced in and through various discourses that decide what is to be considered as subjects. In other words, Foucault argues that,

Systems of categorization do not just arrange content: they both naturalise a certain mediated version of the world, and simultaneously render anything else more or less unthinkable (Bradley, Schirato 9).

In Butler’s theory of gender as presented in *Gender Trouble*, it is the discourse of heterosexuality which produces certain norms for what is considered as respectively intelligible and unintelligible genders, and thus presents these norms as natural. What Butler seeks to do, is to reveal the very “constructedness” of such norms, and thus challenge the heteronormative dominance.

Althusser and the Concept of Interpellation

Butler’s definition of the subject focuses very much on *recognition*: how to become a subject is to be acknowledged as one by an external power. This leads us to the concept of *interpellation*, a term coined by French philosopher Louis Althusser. In his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),” Althusser describes how ideology “‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals [...] or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects [...] by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing” (Althusser online). To be hailed by an ideology can for instance be, as Althusser explains, to respond to someone shouting “Hey, you there!” Althusser describes how the hailed subject will turn around, and,

By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was really him who was hailed’ (and not someone else) (Althusser online).

This idea of interpellation as a key factor in constituting a subject shares similarities with how Foucault, and later Butler, sees the subject as being formed in language. In

Understanding Judith Butler, Brady and Schirato explain how “to be hailed and categorized ‘into existence’, and thus rendered visible and explicable within the terms and evaluative regimes of the culture in which we are located, is to be ‘called a name’” (95).

As I briefly touched upon earlier, a subject is hailed as either a boy or a girl as the first thing in life, and these categories we are “hailed into” have in them “definitions we cannot control and do not necessarily accept, and which will be modified or even transformed across different contexts and cultural fields, and, importantly, over time” (Brady, Schirato 97). What is problematic, however, is when the subject in question cannot be named, or is named on false premises. To not be recognized as a subject is often the painful existence, or rather non-existence, of unintelligible genders, as we will see especially in relation to Cal/lie in *Middlesex*. Brady and Schirato explain how Butler claims that in order to be recognized as a subject “one must be recognizable and explicable within a particular grid of intelligibility that makes subjects appear, and authorizes the subject’s status as an identity-in-waiting” (6), meaning that certain norms exist for how one must perform identity in order to be constituted as a subject by the existing discourse. To be constituted as a subject as an intersexual, for instance, one must consequently conform to the category of male or female in order to be recognized as an intelligible gender in the existing discourse where the binary oppositions of male and female and the norm of heterosexuality are dominating.

Butler also pays attention to the relationship between the subject and the discourses of power, and how to be subjected is ultimately what makes us subjects. Butler argues that “subjection signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” (*The Psychic Life of Power* 2). This means that in order to become a subject, someone has to define you as one, and this someone necessarily needs to inhabit a position of power to make the subjection valid. In that way, to become a subject is a process that is located outside the individual, rather it is located in the cultural, political and social discourse that recognizes the individual as a subject, which means that if one is not recognizable as a subject for the discourses of power, one does not become a subject. Hence, in order to achieve greater acceptance for those genders now considered unintelligible, the change has to be made on the level of the discourse, not the individual.

Concluding Remarks

I have presented in this chapter, both the background for my choice of topic and for my choice of primary texts, and the background for the theories of Judith Butler on which my analysis in the chapters to come will be based. Butler's theoretical background is manifold, and through her diverse background she succeeds in presenting a proposal for a new way of looking at gender that has a broad appeal. Butler's ideas is not necessarily meant to be applied to literary texts, but through this thesis I want to show how literature has the power to make us see things differently. For me, it is the very humanity behind Butler's ideas that first of all makes them so important: her wish is simply to make life a little more worth living, for *all* individuals, no matter gender and/or sexuality.

I will explore in the chapters to come how *Orlando* and *Middlesex*, despite their completely different background, both share a "Butlerian" view of gender and gender identity. As my exploration of Butler's theories has shown, my main focus will be on gender as performance, Butler's critique of categorical thinking and the present status of gender categorization and identification as exclusively based on the binary oppositions of male and female. The representation of the "unintelligible" genders of Orlando and Cal/lie, who in different ways challenge the notion of a stable gender identity, will reveal the categories of male and female as socially and culturally constructed. I will show how Woolf and Eugenides present a new way of looking at gender and identity along the lines of Butler's theories, and thus how they both broaden our understanding of, and our way of looking at, gender; *all* types of gender.

CHAPTER 2: *Orlando*

This chapter will present a reading of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* in light of the novel's representation of gender. The main focus will be on if, and how, the novel challenges our traditional ideas of gender, and thus how Woolf's treatment of gender in the novel may help us look differently at gender and gender categories. As indicated in the previous chapter, my main theoretical focus will be on Judith Butler and her idea of gender as performance and her proposal to question the present status of gender categorization. To what extent does Virginia Woolf portray gender in accordance with Butler's view presented in the previous chapter, and what kind of effect does Woolf's novel have on our understanding of gender? In order to answer these questions, I will look at several aspects of the representation of gender in the novel.

First of all, I will consider how Woolf's own feminist point of view is fictionalized in *Orlando*, focusing on the concept of androgyny as explained in Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*. Following this, I will investigate *Orlando* as an androgynous being, and how androgyny challenges the division of gender into the binary oppositions of male and female, and how it can be related to the concept of gender as performance. Through this I will also look at male *Orlando*'s love interests, and how his relationships form his gender identity and mark it as ambiguous. Further, I will explore how Woolf uses clothing and disguises as ways of portraying gender as performance, and thus, how gender is revealed as a superficial structure. I will point to how *Orlando* in the novel easily shifts from one gender to the other, indicating the very instability of the categories of male and female. Additionally, I will look at the actual transformation from male to female, and show how this event challenges the idea that gender identity is absolute and natural, and how Woolf presents *Orlando* as a complex being that cannot be defined as belonging to a single, fraught category. Through the exploration of these themes, I will shed light on Woolf's use of humor, and how the novel plays with, and mocks, stereotypical gender conventions, and thus how the use of parody and humor can work as resistance against established gender norms.

Virginia Woolf and Feminism

Dealing with an author of Virginia Woolf's importance, it is first of all necessary to look closer at some aspects of her personal life, background, and critical thinking in order to understand her view on gender as portrayed in *Orlando*. I will thus begin this chapter looking at Virginia Woolf, "the feminist," and I will especially pay attention to her concept of androgyny as presented in her famous work *A Room of One's Own*. *A Room of One's Own*, published in 1929, the year after *Orlando*, seems to theorize what Woolf plays with fictionally in *Orlando*, and thus the text presents in a sense a critic's approach to the concept of androgyny. Through this, I will explore how the character of Orlando can be seen as Woolf's fictional portrait of the androgynous. As Laura Marcus describes in "Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf," the lines between Woolf's fictional and theoretical works are often rather blurred: "her novels take up the images and imaginings of her pamphlets and essays: her 'non-fiction' uses strategies more often associated with fictional narrative," (217) and this will be discussed later in relation to *A Room of One's Own* and *Orlando*.

Virginia Woolf is regarded as one of our foremost feminist writers, and has been praised both for her fictional and theoretical work. The feminist label has emerged mostly due to her essayistic writings, but as alluded to above, one can easily recognize Woolf's theoretical ideas and thoughts also in her fiction. Laura Marcus argues that the relationship between Virginia Woolf and feminism is of a symbiotic character. She explains how Woolf's works, both the fictional and the theoretical, center around women: women's lives and histories, but also how feminist criticism has altered our perception and reception of Woolf as a writer (Marcus 209). It is indeed true that feminist readings of Woolf's texts exploded as the field of feminist criticism emerged, but nevertheless, as Woolf left behind for us not just novels, but also critical texts to support her legacy, one can truly say that Woolf was a feminist writer.

Woolf's perhaps most discussed contribution to the field of feminist theory, and the text that most clearly places her in the feminist category, is the above mentioned *A Room of One's Own*. In the following paragraphs I will look closer at a central concept presented in this essay, namely androgyny. I will consider the concept of

androgyny as such, how Woolf defines this concept, and further how androgyny is relevant to *Orlando* and Woolf's portrayal of gender in the novel.

Androgyny

According to *the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, to be *androgynous* means “having both male and female characteristics; looking neither strongly male nor strongly female” (OALD). Following this definition, androgyny is a term describing someone's outer appearance and physical look. One can appear androgynous with the right type of clothes, or a certain kind of haircut, and the “androgynous look” has often been associated with trends and the fashion industry. Looking up androgynous in the Oxford English Dictionary online, however, gives us the definition: “uniting the (physical) characters of both sexes, at once male and female; hermaphrodite,” and further the Oxford English Dictionary defines *androgyny* as a “union of sexes in one individual; hermaphroditism” (OED online). The inclusion of hermaphroditism in these definitions indicates that they talk about a union of male and female at a biological level, which is the case of Cal/lie in *Middlesex*, but we may also read the definition to include the behavior, personality, and thinking of an individual, and it is this part of being androgynous which will be my focus in the paragraphs to come. I will focus on androgyny at a more intellectual and spiritual level, that is how, or *if*, one can be both male *and* female mentally.

The ideas of thinking and, more importantly *writing*, androgynously is explored by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, where she writes that “it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman – manly or man – womanly.” (102). When Woolf writes about androgyny, it involves more than being androgynous at a superficial level; she talks about the androgynous brain and the androgynous self, not just androgyny as a physical characteristic. To explain Woolf's interest in the androgynous we must once again turn to her social, cultural and intellectual background. In *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, Carolyn G. Heilbrun describes the Bloomsbury group as the first example of an androgynous life style in practice; “for the first time a group existed in which masculinity and femininity were marvelously mixed in its members”

(118). As I touched upon in the first chapter, the importance of Woolf's intellectual stimulus in the Bloomsbury group should not be underestimated, as well as the group's open-minded view on sexuality and desire. Heilbrun writes that,

The fusion within the Bloomsbury group, perhaps for the first time, of "masculinity" and "femininity" made possible the ascendancy of reason which excludes violence but not passion; Bloomsbury consciously rejected the Victorian stereotypes of "masculine" and "feminine" in favor of an androgynous ideal (126).

Additionally, Woolf grew up in a time where science made rapid progress and knowledge and reason were increasingly valued in society. Prominent thinkers of Woolf's time contributed to an environment where sex and gender were openly discussed. Names like Richard Von Krafft-Ebing, Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, Otto Weininger and Sigmund Freud touched upon theories of androgyny: "a third sex in which masculine and feminine characteristics (drawn of course along the lines of biological essentialist binary thought) came together in a single body" (Elizabeth Wright 2). In the introduction to *Orlando*, Sandra M. Gilbert quotes Havelock Ellis who, in his book *The Psychology of Sex*, wrote that,

We may not know exactly what sex is, but we do know that it is mutable, with the possibility of one sex being changed into the other sex, that its frontiers are often uncertain, and that there are many stages between a complete male and a complete female (xviii).

That ideas like this were discussed in public was undoubtedly a contributing factor to the production, and largely positive reception, of *Orlando*. Virginia Woolf's dear friend, and the person whom *Orlando* is dedicated to, Vita Sackville-West, may also have inspired Woolf to explore the concept of androgyny, something I will come back to later in this chapter when looking at the role of clothing and costumes in *Orlando*.

Reinforcing the Binaries or Establishing New Possibilities?

What exactly does it mean to have an androgynous mind, and how can we describe androgyny at an intellectual level, away from the term as a description of physical appearance? Androgyny as a concept can, according to Marilyn R. Farwell, either be defined as based on balance or based on fusion, that is "either an interplay of separate and unique elements or a fusion of one into the other" (434). Farwell seems to favor the concept based on balance because she argues that in the case of fusion one single

mode of response and knowing is validated, and this, in her view, will be the masculine. She explains this with a brief historical account of the myth of androgyny, a myth traditionally based on the One (the masculine) incorporating the Other (the feminine), hence a fusion where the masculine dominates as the One and the feminine is subordinated as the Other (Farwell 438). This traditional understanding of the myth of androgyny explains the existing critique against androgyny: does the concept only reinforce the gender binaries of male and female, putting the male in a dominant position? This point is also explored by Karen Kaivola who in her essay “Revisiting Woolf’s Representation of Androgyny” writes that,

Feminist critics worried that the freedom androgyny supposedly offered women was in fact a ruse, a conservative fantasy that, given its dependence upon patriarchal ideas of gender difference, its history of incorporating the (female) other into the (male) self, and its heterosexist structure, holds only an illusory promise for those interested in new forms of social organization and gender identity (237).

Consequently, the concept of androgyny would only maintain the binary gender system, as the incorporation of the female into the masculine happens on the premises of the masculine. Further, there is an understanding that androgyny is to stand for something universal, and in a patriarchal society the universal is traditionally linked to the male, hence the androgynous will be dominated by the masculine. The question is thus: how can the concept of androgyny escape the masculine dominance forced upon it? Is androgyny indeed an illusion impossible to fulfill, or is it possible to achieve a status of true androgyny, where male and female coexist in one person without the one dominating over the other?

I would argue that one needs to look at androgyny as an expansion of perception, and thus as a possibility rather than a limitation. Even though the traditional myth of androgyny puts the male in the dominant position it does not have to work that way in practice today. I think androgyny based on balance will make us able to exploit both our masculinity and femininity fully, and to “use both without destroying the other” (Farwell 442). In Annis Pratt’s words, “androgynicity is a delightful interchange between qualities usually set in opposition to one another” (Farwell 442). I think this quote touches upon one important aspect, namely that one should stop constantly viewing male and female as opposites and define them against each other, but rather one should embrace the qualities of both genders that exist

latent in each individual. Only in that way, can the concept of androgyny be realized and reach its full potential.

Woolf's aim as presented in *A Room of One's Own* is similar to this view, and it is also how Farwell describes the ideal status of androgyny. As Farwell states, the goal is to see androgyny as an expansion rather than a limitation, meaning that "neither side is reduced to the other in defeat, but each contributes to dynamic tension which defines the unity" (Farwell 442). In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf indicates that it is only through exploiting both the female and the masculine sides of our mind that we take advantage of our full potential as human beings. Woolf's description of the androgynous aims for a compatible and universal way of thinking: "If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her" (*A Room of One's Own* 97). I will, however, not decipher Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* here, as the object of my investigation is indeed *Orlando*, so I will try to look at these issues related to androgyny explored above based on my reading of *Orlando*, as I see *Orlando* and its protagonist, as a fictionalized version of the ideas later theorized in *A Room of One's Own*.

Orlando and Androgyny

"Different though the sexes are, they intermix" (134).

In the following paragraphs, I will look at how androgyny operates in *Orlando*, and how the concept can be seen as a challenge towards the separation of male and female into two separate categories and as challenging to the traditional gender norms. I will try to decide whether Woolf succeeds in establishing a truly androgynous character without one gender dominating over the other, or if she rather portrays a feminine or masculine type of androgyny that reinforces the binary oppositions of male and female. As a starting point, I would like to turn to a question posed by Esther-Sanchez Pardo-Gonzales in the essay "What Phantasmagoria the Mind Is: Reading Virginia Woolf's Parody of Gender":

If the feminine and the masculine have to coexist, and there is no prevalence of any of the two, one might infer that they either neutralize each other, or that one of the two is foregrounded. It would then be interesting to consider Orlando's sexuality as governed by

his/her gender and thus determine if he respectively behaves as a “man – womanly” and as a “woman – manly,” or as a genderless being whose gendered sexuality has been neutralized (77).

My analysis will thus be based on whether Orlando can be seen as a “man – womanly,” a “woman – manly,” or a “genderless being.” Are the two genders intermixed at an equal level, or is rather one dominating over the other? First of all, analyzing the character of Orlando I will argue that there is a difference in Orlando’s awareness of gender, and thus his/her performance of it, before and after the transformation. Consequently, I will try to focus on the differences in Orlando’s behavior in the two parts of the novel, and consider in which part he/she is closest to the androgynous ideal Woolf describes in *A Room of One’s Own*.

Orlando as a Woman: Playing with Gender

I will first turn to the second half of the novel where Orlando has become a woman, as this part of the novel most directly deals with issues of gender and gender performance. At this point in the story, Orlando inhabits a rather unique position, as she now has lived as, and performed, both sexes. Seeing *Orlando* in light of *A Room of One’s Own*, it is probable that Woolf wanted to present female Orlando as a personification of the ideal status of androgyny; someone who knows the secrets of both sexes and can access the whole specter of human experience, and thus is able to exploit her intellect and creativity fully. This position allows Orlando to choose the “best of both worlds,” as described in a passage in the novel: “nor can there be any doubt that she reaped a twofold harvest by this device; the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied” (153).

The narrator describes how Orlando inhabits characteristics and personality traits considered typically male *and* typically female: “if Orlando was a woman, how did she never take more than ten minutes to dress?” and at the same time “she could drink with the best and liked games of hazard” (133). Orlando was tender-hearted, but she detested household matters, she rode well, but she would burst into tears on slight provocation, (133) signaling a personality made up of stereotypical traits of both femininity and masculinity. Woolf presents this with humor and irony, and thus she almost seems to ridicule the stereotypical gender conventions. Through mockery, she

criticizes how male and female are put into two opposite categories with incompatible qualities, and that to inhabit a quality of the opposite gender will lead to confusion, and, in worst case, mark you as an unintelligible gender. For Woolf, however, there is no need to define, determine or categorize Orlando: “whether, then, Orlando was most man or woman, it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided,” (133) and that it is impossible to do so is, in Woolf’s fictional universe, perfectly fine.

Through the use of humor and irony, Woolf does not only want to show how Orlando inhabits both male and female characteristics, but she also wants to question *why* it is that we think of these characteristics as typically male or typically female. Why is it that “it was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman” (179)? Could it not just as well have been the other way around, for instance that sentimentality was typically male, and that being into drinking and games of hazard was typically female? Winifred Holtby, one of the earliest feminist critics of Woolf’s work, touched upon this in her reading of *A Room of One’s Own* and *Orlando*, writing that,

Looking round upon the world of human beings as we know it, we are hard put to it to say what is the natural shape of men or women, so old, so all-enveloping are the moulds fitted by history and custom over their personalities. We do not know how much of sensitiveness, intuition, docility and tenderness may not be naturally “male,” how much of curiosity, aggression, audacity and combativeness may not be “female” (Marcus 226).

This is exactly what Butler focuses on as well: how what we take for granted as natural features of one gender is really traits that have been designed to that gender over time, through social and political norms, and that are being performed, and repeated every day and thus reinforced as absolute features. I think Woolf, in letting Orlando inhabit characteristics from both gender categories, wants to question exactly this idea: why is it that this and that are typically male, and this and that typically female; can one not instead choose freely how one wants to act, and not be limited by gender norms that reveal themselves to be social constructions? Additionally, Woolf shows that there are indeed acts that make up a gender, and consequently she seems to deny the existence of a gender core, following Butler’s statement that “the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 522).

As illustrated earlier in this chapter through the presentation of Woolf's concept of androgyny in *A Room of One's Own*, the ideal state of androgyny is that of harmony; that not one gender dominates over the other, but that they are balanced equally. It is true that Orlando inhabits both female and male characteristics after the transformation, and that she can exploit both sides, but is Orlando's female and male personality equally balanced, or does one side dominate over the other, or do they rather remain separated?

The narrator describes Orlando's androgynous personality stating that "for it was this mixture in her of man and woman, one being uppermost and then the other, that often gave her conduct an unexpected turn," (133) which precisely indicates that there is always one of the sides (male *or* female) that dominates in Orlando, and thus her androgynous personality is not characterized by equality. Her performance of masculinity and femininity may be balanced, but I will argue that Orlando's awareness of both genders keeps her female and male side rigidly separated: they never intermix or operate at the same time, and hence Orlando as a woman does not fulfill the ideal status of androgyny. We see at several points in the novel that Orlando changes from a feminine to a masculine behavior and then back again: "for her sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive" (153). Orlando actively exploits her androgynous position, shifting from masculine to feminine according to the situation and her surroundings, as when she as a perfect lady pours tea for Mr. Pope, before later the same night walking in the streets of London dressed as a "noble Lord," (149) and finally revealing herself as a woman to the prostitute Nell.

As a woman, Orlando inhabits a position where she knows what is expected of each gender in a given situation. This is for instance shown in the above-mentioned episode with Nell. When Orlando, dressed as a man, meets Nell, she is able to decode Nell's behavior, and understands why she acts the way she does,

Having been so lately a woman herself, she suspected that the girl's timidity and her hesitating answers and the very fumbling with the key in the latch and the fold of her cloak and the droop of her wrist were all put on to gratify her masculinity (150).

This episode is a very good example of how gender roles indeed are performances one puts on as a way of reinforcing the already existing conventions of what is

typically male and female. Nell's act is performed to strengthen Orlando's masculinity and her own femininity, and Orlando, even though not being a male at this point, has however learned to perform masculinity, and can thus respond as expected to Nell's female performance. Consequently, Nell's and Orlando's gender performance confirms their positions in two separate gender categories.

Another example of such gender performance is found when Orlando reflects on her reaction to men crying:

That men cry as frequently and unreasonably as women, Orlando knew from her own experience as a man; but she was beginning to be aware that women should be shocked when men display emotion in their presence, and so, shocked she was (127).

Again, Orlando having experienced both genders knows what is expected of her, and thus acts according to the gender norms. Woolf shows how gender conventions are based on social norms and codes that sometimes can be hard to understand, but Orlando, who has inhabited both sides, plays her part as a woman to perfection. Examples of such episodes are found several times after Orlando's transformation, showing that Orlando has revealed the very performativity of gender, and can thus perform as expected of her in various situations. This again shows that gender is a temporal process: one learns to perform gender correctly over time. We see that Orlando becomes more and more accustomed to her female identity throughout the second part of the novel. In the first period after the transformation, the narrator describes how Orlando "was still awkward in the arts of her sex," (128) but when reaching the Victorian period she starts looking for a husband, someone to "lean upon," (168) and she eventually has a baby, which indicates that her female gender identity develops over time through the repetition and performance of acts considered feminine.

Orlando as a Man: A "Man – Womanly"?

I have now only looked at episodes from Orlando's life after the transformation, but what about Orlando as a man? How is Orlando's awareness of gender roles and conventions in the first part of the novel? At this time, Orlando is only unconsciously aware that he embodies both sexes, and thus femininity and masculinity intermix more freely as Orlando has not yet learned how to separate his one self from the other.

We do not experience gender performance at such a level as seen in the second half, but still there is a presence of female gender identity in the novel's beginning as well. I will argue that Orlando before the transformation is, using Esther-Sanchez Pardo-Gonzales' words, a "man - womanly," and even though he is biologically male, there is an ambiguity surrounding his gender identity, as I will show with some examples from the novel.

First of all, Orlando's physical appearance hints towards an ambiguous gender identity. Describing Orlando's looks, Woolf plays with what is considered as a typical masculine appearance by using words and images signaling femininity. His features are described as very delicate and pure:

He had eyes like drenched violets, so large that the water seemed to have brimmed in them and widened them; and a brow like the swelling of a marble dome pressed between the two blank medallions which were his temples (12).

Orlando is undoubtedly described as good-looking, and it is interesting to note how Woolf's description of Orlando goes against what we expect from a description of a good-looking man. Traditionally, masculine men are viewed as the most attractive, but Woolf's Orlando, however, is delicate and feminine, but still considered attractive by the opposite sex.

Based on the descriptions of his physical appearance at the beginning of the novel, Orlando as a young man could definitely be described as a "man – womanly," but what about his mentality and behavior, is that of an androgynous character as well? It is much more difficult to find evidence of androgyny in the first half of the novel, as the second half more actively deals with gender and the differences between male and female, but I will argue that Orlando from the very beginning inhabits a personality made up of both masculine and feminine elements. Even though Orlando is a typical man in many ways, there is a delicacy and fragility about him that hints towards an ambiguous gender identity. Orlando is described as shy (16), melancholic, and as having a passionate emotional life: "for that was the way his mind worked now, in violent see-saws from life to death, stopping at nothing in between" (32). It is hard to point at specific examples, but the narrator succeeds in making Orlando into a complex character inhabiting characteristics not only considered typically manly. This is especially evident in Woolf's portrayal of Orlando's love life. Certainly, as a true

“manly man” he is involved with a lot of women, but still Woolf manages to describe Orlando’s relationships in a way that makes them ambiguous, and thus Woolf’s portrayal of Orlando’s love life is a contributing factor in establishing his gender identity as ambiguous.

Orlando’s affair with Sasha is the first serious relationship portrayed in the novel. On the surface, this is a traditional heterosexual relationship, but there are, however, factors present in their affair that makes it ambiguous, and that make their gender roles rather blurred. Orlando falls head over heels for Sasha, “Orlando stared; trembled; turned hot; turned cold,” (27) even before he is certain that she is a woman. Further, his feeling of love is described as if “the thickness of his blood melted; the ice turned to wine in his veins; he heard the waters flowing and the birds singing; spring broke over the hard wintry landscape” (28). The passionate and emotional nature of Orlando’s feelings towards Sasha turns him into an irrational, and thus, feminine figure. He is the one being devastated after Sasha leaves him, and he goes into a state of solitude and depression, forgetting how to be a true male: “it was a thousand pities to see so fine a nobleman moping about the house when he might be hunting the fox or chasing the deer” (50). On the other hand, the narrator describes how Sasha changes Orlando into a perfect nobleman, “full of grace and manly courtesy,” (29) and how he would “offer her his hand for the dance, or catch the spotted kerchief which she had let drop” (29). In that way, we can say that Orlando acts androgynously in his relationship with Sasha, letting both his male and female sides operate.

Generally, it seems like Orlando is not fascinated by stereotypically feminine women, but rather women that are ambiguous in their gender and sexual identity. He prefers more “masculine” women over the feminine and delicate. This is true for Sasha, but also for the “low women” that are “bold in their speech and free in their manners,” (21) and for Archduchess Harriet, this “very tall lady,” (77) who in fact turns out to be a man. As for Archduchess Harriet it is perhaps not a fascination, and definitely not love, but there is undoubtedly sexual desire: “and it was Lust the vulture, not Love, the Bird of Paradise, that flopped, foully and disgustingly, upon his shoulders” (82). The fact that Orlando feels sexually attracted to someone who is actually a man underlines the very ambiguity surrounding Orlando’s sexual identity.

The narrator explains at one point that “love [...] has two faces, one white, the other black; two bodies; one smooth, the other hairy,” (82) which indicates that love is based on opposites: the binary oppositions of male and female. In *Orlando*, however, the role of the male and the female is not always clearly limited, and there is room for the male to act feminine, and the female to act masculine, as for instance when Orlando states that “I have done with men,” (66) which is a strange thing to say being a man himself. Through the portrayal of Orlando’s love interests as a man, Woolf highlights his ambiguous gender identity. She plays with the expected roles of man and woman in a traditional heterosexual relationship, and by turning things upside-down she makes us doubt Orlando’s sexual and gender identity. It is perhaps also worth mentioning that this portrayal of Orlando’s love life continues when she is a woman as well. Describing the relationship between Orlando and the man she chooses to marry, Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, the narrator states that “it was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman” (179). Through Marmaduke’s and Orlando’s relationship, Woolf seems to mock the stereotypical definitions of what is considered as typically male and typically female, and she opens for a more liberal understanding of the roles intended for each gender in a heterosexual relationship.

A Successful Portrait of the Androgynous Mind?

It is clear that Orlando as a woman has a great advantage; she has experienced both how it is to be male and how it is to be female, but is she a successful portrait of the androgynous mind, and is Orlando necessarily more androgynous in the second part of the novel? The narrator states at one point that “whether, then, Orlando was most man or woman, it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided” (133). I agree that it is indeed difficult to determine whether Orlando is a “man – womanly,” or a “woman – manly,” but he is never woman and man at the same time, there is no incorporating the two into one; there is performance of the male gender, and there is performance of the female gender, but always separately. There is definitely a great understanding of both sexes present in Orlando in the novel’s second half, but she has not developed into a perfect mix of feminine and masculine, rather Orlando as a woman exploits her

knowledge of both sexes and performs masculinity and femininity by the rules, but never at the same time.

It can look like there is a difference in how Virginia Woolf describes the ideal status of androgyny in *A Room of One's Own*, and how it works in practice through the character of Orlando, something Karen Kaivola also makes a point of. She writes that,

In *A Room of One's Own*, androgyny is imagined as a seamless reconciliation of difference, while in *Orlando* gender distinctions are maintained even as they intermix, implying fundamental differences that alternate but cannot be transcended or synthesized (237).

I think her description fits perfectly to how I see Orlando as a woman in the second half of the book. There is a clear distinction between what is masculine and what is feminine, even though Orlando performs both genders. I will actually argue that there is a greater degree of balance and harmony in Orlando at the novel's beginning. Orlando before the transformation is just unconsciously aware that he embodies both a feminine and a masculine side, and the ambiguous nature of his gender identity can very well be described as androgynous. The role of gender and the differences between them is not explored so actively in the novel's first part, and thus, as I hinted above, there is an unconscious presence of gender ambiguity in Orlando as a man.

Even though Orlando perhaps does not fit the description of perfect androgynous harmony, his/her play with gender roles certainly challenges the traditional view of gender as two separate categories, and the idea of gender as something absolute and natural. Orlando's transformation from male to female, and her way of performing both femininity and masculinity shows that gender is indeed made up by the repetition of acts, and that gender identity does not exist prior to the acts which establish it. In the essay "Sex, Gender, and Androgyny in Virginia Woolf's Mock-Biographies 'Friendship Gallery' and *Orlando*," Sarah Hastings writes that Woolf,

Slowly acclimate[s] her reader to the notion of sex and gender being disengaged from each other and ultimately replaced with an androgynous personhood that comfortably pulls from all realms of personal attributes (31).

Through this, Hastings indicates that Woolf wants to prove that there is no such thing as a female or male gender core, and that the acts of gender have nothing to do with

biology. Even though Orlando's androgyny is not perfectly balanced, his/her identity is androgynous in the sense that Orlando, both as a male and as a female, challenges the stereotypical conventions assigned to each gender, as he performs femininity as a man and masculinity as a woman. Orlando's ability to transcend gender boundaries shows that gender identity is not absolute, and thus Woolf seems to promote a Butlerian understanding of how gender is constructed through performance, and a critique of the absolute nature of the gender categories of male and female.

Performing Gender Through Clothing

"It is clothes that wear us and not we them" (132).

One prominent feature of Woolf's mockery of gender conventions in *Orlando* is her frequent play with clothing and cross-dressing. Costumes and disguises are perhaps one of the first things we associate with performance in the traditional meaning of the word, and Woolf uses this aspect by literally letting her characters perform different identities through putting on different costumes. In addition, Woolf's play with clothing and disguises presents a performance of gender in the Judith Butler sense of the word, as it reveals the very "constructedness" and arbitrariness of gender categories.

Vita Sackville-West and Cross-Dressing

We cannot talk about Woolf's play with clothing in *Orlando* without drawing parallels to the person who inspired Woolf to write the novel, namely Vita Sackville-West. It is no secret that Sackville-West was a dear person and a great inspiration to Woolf; *Orlando* is in fact called "the longest and most charming love letter in literature" (Gilbert xv). A lot has been said about the actual character of Sackville-West and Woolf's relationship, but I will not go into detail on that topic here. Of relevance for my investigation, however, is how Sackville-West's ambiguous sexual and gender identity inspired Woolf to write a novel that even today remains controversial in its portrayal of gender. As for this particular topic, I will look a bit closer at how Sackville-West describes her experiences with cross-dressing.

In *Portrait of a Marriage*, Vita's son Nigel Nicolson quotes from his mother's diary entries, which is again explored by Sarah Hastings in her essay "Sex, Gender, and Androgyny in Virginia Woolf's Mock-Biographies 'Friendship Gallery' and *Orlando*." Through these reflections, Sackville-West describes how she practiced cross-dressing when living in Paris: "I dressed as a boy. [...] It must have been successful, because no one looked at me at all curiously or suspiciously - never once, out of the many times I did it" (Hastings 27). She further describes how she one time went out on the streets of London dressed as a boy, concluding her experience with "the extraordinary thing was, how natural it all was for me," and further claiming that she "never felt so free" (Hastings 27). As Hastings argues, Sackville-West practiced cross-dressing not out of sexual desire, but rather for social and political reasons. She enjoyed the freedom she experienced dressed as a man. Hastings describes how Sackville-West,

Strove to garner whatever personality characteristics felt most comfortable to her, whether they were traditionally feminine or masculine. This penchant for resisting the automatic gendering according to a biologically binary system promoted an androgynous lifestyle that she greatly embraced and embodied (28).

We see that she refused to act according to gender conventions, and she did not want her life to be limited by placing herself in a specific gender category. Sackville-West thus promoted a view on gender Judith Butler later came to represent: one cannot, and must not, escape the category of female, but one can criticize how, by whom, and under which circumstances the category is constructed, and one can choose to act outside the norms society has produced for this particular category, and in that way deconstruct the restrictive categories now available. To sum up, Sackville-West was "not dissatisfied with being a biological woman, but categorically dissatisfied with what society expected and demanded of women" (Hastings 28). This goes well together with how Butler argues that feminism needs to stop trying to escape the category of female, rather they must resist from within how the category of female is constructed.

How masquerade and cross-dressing function as a way of escaping gender categories, is also explored by Peter Stokes in "Consuming Desires: Performing Gender in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* and Sally

Potter's *Orlando*". He writes that masquerade,

Offered a temporary liberation from the constraints of hegemonic patriarchal society in which sanctioned definitions of culture, nature, and truth were coequal with a compulsory heterosexuality (348).

This indicates what Sackville-West's experiences hinted at, that masquerade functions as an escape from reality, a break from the constraints of society, and thus masquerade and cross-dressing as performance fit under the anti-authoritarian performance described by Judith Butler. Masquerade and cross-dressing become a way to perform a *different* type of gender outside of the existing norms, demonstrating that gender is not something absolute, and that there exists no such thing as a gender core.

Turning to Woolf in particular, I think the reason she focuses so much on the role of clothing and costumes in creating an identity, is precisely because she wants to reveal the very arbitrariness of gender, and how much gender has to do with superficial features that are culturally and socially constructed. This point is also elaborated by Daouda Coulibaly, who in her essay "Crisis in Gender Identification: An Experience in the Fluidity of Being – Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*" states that "clothes are visible signifiers of the arbitrariness of the social construction of gender" (103). The importance of clothing and appearance in establishing an identity should not be underestimated. Just think about when meeting a person for the first time; it is the person's physical appearance and clothes that make us place him or her in the category of male, or in the category of female, and if we are unable to place the person in one of these two categories, confusion arises. In *Orlando*, Woolf shows how clothing and the right gender performance can fool us into believing someone inhabiting a gender that they do not belong to biologically, and she also presents how external factors such as clothing play a huge role in the shaping of a person's gender identity, both in relation to how one perceives oneself, and how one is viewed by others.

***Orlando* and the Role of Clothing**

Clothing in *Orlando* is presented both as something that is shaping individuals and something that itself is shaped by the time it exists in. Already when introducing Orlando in the novel's very first sentence, the narrator points to how clothes influence how we perceive a person's gender: "he – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it" (11). Here fashion does not work as something that strengthens Orlando's status as a man, but rather as something that makes us doubt it. Usually clothing builds up under one's gender identity, but as we see at several points in *Orlando*, it can also make one's gender identity more ambiguous. Additionally, this quote focuses on how fashion is a product of its time, the contemporary culture, and thus again we see how gender conventions and stereotypical characteristics of one gender are produced within a discourse existing at a specific time in a specific culture, which indicates that gender is not absolute, but rather constantly developing.

That fashion is a product of a specific culture and period, is also apparent in Orlando's first meeting with Sasha. Sasha is described as "a figure, which, whether boy's or woman's, for the loose tunic and trousers of the Russian fashion served to disguise the sex, filled him [Orlando] with the highest curiosity" (26). Sasha, coming from a different culture than Orlando, appears as gender ambiguous to Orlando, as he is not a part of her cultural discourse, and thus is not able to decode her appearance. We see that clothes cause uncertainty about a person's gender, and through this confusion, Woolf succeeds in creating a relationship between Sasha and Orlando that goes against heteronormativity, even though it in fact is a traditional heterosexual relationship.

It is not only with Sasha that we experience "gender confusion" because of clothing and masquerade. The character of Archduchess Harriet/Archduke Harry is an example of someone using clothing consciously to trick others into believing they inhabit the opposite gender. The first time Orlando and the Archduke meet, the Archduke goes under the name Archduchess Harriet, and his appearance suggests that he is a female, although not inhabiting stereotypical feminine traits or a feminine behavior. When Orlando has become a woman, however, it is revealed that Archduchess Harriet is in fact a man, Archduke Harry. When Harry reveals his true

identity it is through removing his clothes: “[...] in her place stood a tall gentleman in black. A heap of clothes lay in the fender” (126). Archduchess Harriet/Archduke Harry is perhaps the clearest example of someone literally performing gender in the novel, as his performance is most similar to those we find on a theatre stage. Woolf even writes about Orlando and the Archduke that “they acted the parts of man and woman for ten minutes with great vigour and then fell into natural discourse” (126). It is interesting to note how Woolf distinguishes between them *acting* as man and woman, and *then* falling into *natural* discourse. This indicates that Woolf sees the stereotypical gender conventions as fake, hence not natural, and that to operate according to them is to perform, or act.

Further, it is worth noticing Orlando’s reaction to the Archduke’s revelation of his true gender: Orlando was “recalled thus suddenly to a consciousness of her sex, which she had completely forgotten, and of his, which was now remote enough to be equally upsetting, Orlando felt seized with faintness” (126). The fact that Orlando becomes increasingly aware of her own sex after Harry reveals his true gender identity, shows how sex and gender are very much defined in opposition to something: the Other, meaning that for femininity to exist there needs to be masculinity, and vice versa. Male and female, and the norms assigned to each category are strengthened and reinforced by the existence of the other, the opposite category, an idea that is based on the old-fashioned need to organize the world into binary oppositions. It is this belief in the binary oppositions of male and female that upholds the rigid gender hierarchy, and consequently the fraught gender categories.

“A True English Lady” and “A Noble Lord”

Orlando herself also experiments with cross-dressing, but first after she has turned into a woman, and thus knows how to behave in both a masculine and a feminine way. Before looking at examples of Orlando cross-dressing as a woman, I will focus on how clothing is one of the main contributing factors in the shaping of Orlando’s female identity, together with being treated as a lady by someone from the opposite sex. When for the first time wearing proper women clothes, the narrator explains how “up to this moment she [Orlando] had scarcely given her sex a thought” (108). This supports Woolf’s idea that we as humans are androgynous beings, “genderless,” and

that it is factors shaped, and put upon us, by society that create the categories we know as respectively male and female. That Orlando “had scarcely given her sex a thought” before wearing women’s clothes, indicates that without these superficial factors, such as clothing, we would have no precise idea of what the female (or male) sex *should* be like. This can be linked to Butler’s critique of the separation of sex and gender. She argues that sex, like gender, is culturally constructed, and, according to Gill Jagger in *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics, Social Change and the Power of the Performative*, one need to rethink the category of “sex” as “a cultural norm through which bodies are materialized” (57). Following this view, Butler sees the body as a construction which, as Brady and Schirato explain in *Understanding Judith Butler*, “is not to render it either artificial or false; rather it is to hold that bodies only make sense, only come to be understood, through a variety of descriptive regimes” (38). In short, Woolf’s representation of gender seems to follow Butler’s idea of the body as a construction, as Woolf shows how the female gender identity of Orlando only comes into existence through external factors that are culturally produced, such as clothing.

Further, Woolf also focuses on the role of others in constituting one’s identity as Orlando’s sense of inhabiting a female gender identity is strengthened through her encounter with the Captain on the ship from Turkey to England. The narrator describes how “it was not until she felt the coil of skirts about her legs and the Captain offered, with the greatest politeness, to have an awning spread for her on deck, that she realized with a start the penalties and privileges of her position” (108). It is not just her clothes, but also the behavior of one from the opposite sex, that here makes Orlando conscious of her female gender identity. The captain performs masculinity so that Orlando must play along and thus perform femininity. In her meeting with the Captain, Orlando is hailed as a woman, and thus her female gender identity is established.

Orlando’s journey from Turkey to England is almost like a journey into femininity and the construction of a female gender identity. Orlando spends time contemplating the advantages and disadvantages of her new gender identity, and on how her position in society is altered now that she is a woman. Orlando states that,

This is a pleasant, lazy way of life to be sure. But [...] these skirts are plaguey things to have about one’s heels. Yet the stuff [...] is the loveliest in the world. Never have I seen my own

skin [...] look to such advantage as now. Could I, however, leap overboard and swim in clothes like these? No! Therefore, I should have to trust to the protection of a bluejacket (109).

I think this quote sums up very well how Woolf must have looked at the role of women in her own time, and especially in the Victorian period leading up to her own time. Women led a seemingly carefree life, where the most important thing was to look nice on the arm of their husband, but the fact that Orlando thinks that “these skirts are plaguey things to have about one’s heels” indicates the limitations and restrictions women experienced. Further, that she “should have to trust the protection of a bluejacket” symbolizes that a woman is dependent on a man to swim, that is to survive, and through this Woolf seems to imply that the expected gender roles at her time was not equal: the female was dependent on the male, and thus ranked as subordinate. However, Woolf does not state this critique directly, but rather illustrates it through the description of a situation where again the focus is on the superficial features of gender.

As hinted above, Orlando is not completely over being male in the second half of the novel, and we can find examples of her dressing up and performing the role of a man when actually being a woman. Again, it is through putting on masculine clothes that Orlando succeeds in performing the role of a male, looking “the very figure of a noble lord” (149). Dressed as a man, Orlando wanders the streets of London (not unlike Vita Sackville-West), and she performs perfect masculinity sweeping her hat off to a passing lady “in the manner of a gallant paying his addresses to a lady of fashion in a public place” (150). Orlando comes home with this lady, Nell, and she wrongly mistakes him for a potential male lover. She plays the female role to perfection to rouse Orlando’s manhood, when Orlando all of a sudden decides to reveal her true gender identity: “she flung off all disguise and admitted herself a woman” (151). The narrator describes that “it was remarkable how soon, on discovering that they were of the same sex, her [Nell’s] manner changed and she dropped her plaintive, appealing ways” (151). Being around another woman, Nell does not feel the need to exaggerate her feminine performance as there is no man present to perform masculinity. Through this scene, Woolf displays the artificiality of genders that, according to Esther Sanchez-Pardo Gonzales, “makes them comparable to social classes” (82), indicating that gender categories also allow mobility, and

through this mobility there is a possibility for change; for disrupting the present system.

Clothing as Possibilities, Clothing as Restrictions

How easily Orlando shifts from feminine to masculine, and how she as a woman enjoys the pleasures of both worlds are also shown through the change of clothes: “for the probity of breeches she exchanged the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally” (153). The narrator describes how a typical day for Orlando may start with her wearing “a China robe of ambiguous gender,” and then changing into knee-breeches before working in the garden, followed by wearing a flowered taffeta as she is meeting up with a potential husband, before changing into a snuff-colored gown when visiting court, and finally at night “she would more often than not become a nobleman complete from head to toe, and walk the streets in search of adventure” (153). We see here that clothes and costumes give Orlando numerous possibilities, and various roles to perform. The fact that she starts her day in “a China robe of ambiguous gender” indicates that she starts off as gender neutral, and upon this “blank” she can choose to perform the different gender roles made available by society. Again, Woolf presents a view on gender and sex that is similar to Butler’s: the body is a construction that only comes into existence through external factors that are culturally and socially determined.

Clothing does not, however, only function as a way to escape gender norms, but we also find examples of clothing symbolizing limitations and restrictions. I have already shown how Orlando describes her skirt as “plaguey things to have about one’s heels,” (109) but the most clear example is found in the narrator’s description of the crinoline which is said to be “heavier and more drabb than any dress she [Orlando] had yet worn. None had ever so impeded her movements” (168). The crinoline becomes the ultimate symbol of the Victorian period, which in the novel is portrayed as a time when women became increasingly dependent on a husband, and their sole purpose in life was marriage and child birth: “the life of the average woman was a succession of childbirths” (158). It is a garment that literally makes it difficult to move, and be physically active, and thus it becomes a symbol of the passivity expected of Victorian women. For most of the time, clothing in the novel symbolizes

possibilities for escaping the existing gender norms and for disrupting the gender hierarchy, but the crinoline, however, functions as a symbol *for* these norms and their restrictive nature.

The Cultural, Historical, and Geographical Aspects of Clothing

It is clear that clothes are a product of the period in which they exist, as there is a difference between the sixteenth-century gender ambiguous costume in the opening scene, and the heavy, and clearly feminine, crinoline of the Victorian period. Also, it is important to consider from which perspective one views the costumes, as the idea of what they signalize changes through time. Orlando's clothing in the sixteenth century, for instance, was considered masculine and elegant to contemporaries, whereas for us it looks gender ambiguous, and almost feminine. In relation to both clothing and gender conventions, one needs to look at the specific discourse in which they existed to understand their true meaning.

There are also cultural differences portrayed through clothing in the novel, as when Orlando in her first period as a woman lives with the gypsies in Turkey. With the gypsies, Orlando wears rather gender-neutral clothes, which signalizes that “the gipsy women [...] differ very little from the gipsy men” (108). As already explored, it is when Orlando returns to England that she becomes aware of her position as a female, which indicates that there are differences between the Turkish gipsy community and the English upper-class in how they view gender roles and in how gender is constructed. Throughout the novel Woolf shows, through the use of clothing and costumes, how each period with its own culture has its own norms for how one should perform one's gender correctly. This point is also underlined by Nancy Cervetti in the essay “In the Breeches, Petticoats, and Pleasures of Orlando,” where she states that in *Orlando* “gender becomes a cultural performance shown to be historically, even geographically, contingent and in the service of the regulatory systems of reproduction and compulsory heterosexuality,” (168) and this cultural, historical, and geographical gender performance is presented through the use of clothing and costumes.

Generally, I think that Woolf by focusing on the role of clothing and costumes wants to show how it is superficial features created by society and the cultural discourse in which we exist that create the fraught gender categories of male and female. There is a quote from the novel that sums up very well not just how clothes operate in *Orlando*, but also how gender norms shape the performance of an individual:

Thus, there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking (132).

I think it is relevant to draw a parallel between clothes and gender here, and consequently consider if it is we that shape our gender, or our gender, or rather society's understanding of that gender, that shapes us. If it is indeed true that it is clothes that wear us, it must mean that gender identity is culturally constructed from outside. In "Lesbianism, History, and Censorship: *The Well of Loneliness* and the Suppressed Randiness of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*," Adam Parkes argues that "if clothes wear us, then we are constructed, and potentially censored by some external agency – for instance, by the sexual hierarchy that assigns particular clothes to male and female roles" (452). Through the use of clothes as a determining factor for one's gender identity, Woolf does indeed reveal the very "constructedness" of genders, at the same time as she shows that gender identity is not absolute or limited to either exclusively male or exclusively female. Further, through showing how sex and gender only become visible through socially and culturally constructed features, Woolf seems to share Butler's view that sex itself is a gendered category.

From Male to Female, From Orlando to Orlando

"The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity" (98).

I have until now not paid much attention to the actual gender transformation, which undoubtedly is the most spectacular event in *Orlando*. I will in the following paragraphs look closer at this particular event in the novel, and show how it can be linked to some of Butler's central ideas on gender. I will investigate how Orlando's

gender transformation highlights Butler's idea of the body as a construction, and further how it illustrates the very fluidity of gender; that gender is processual, and that a core female or male identity does not exist.

By the time of Orlando's transformation, he has moved from England to Turkey, working as an ambassador. First of all, I do not think that Woolf's choice of location is a coincidence. Turkey, being in the east, works as a symbol of the mysterious, exotic and feminine, a state Orlando is approaching gradually, and that reaches its climax with him turning into a woman. Before looking at the actual transformation, however, I would like to look at the events leading up to the transformation, and especially the symbolic function of the figures of Our Lady of Chastity, Our Lady of Purity, and Our Lady of Modesty.

“The Ladies” Against “The Truth”

Directly before Orlando wakes up and finds himself a woman, we are presented to Our Lady of Purity, Our Lady of Chastity, and Our Lady of Modesty. These three figures are representing traditional, conservative values, and their purpose is to try to prevent the revelation of Orlando's true gender. In fact, Woolf does not only describe how “the ladies” want to prevent the transformation, they even want to hide the Truth; “Truth come not out from your horrid den. Hide deeper, fearful Truth. For you flaunt in the brutal gaze of the sun things that were better unknown and undone; you unveil the shameful; the dark you make clear, Hide, Hide, Hide!” (96). As “the ladies” are being driven away by the blasting trumpets of Truth, they proclaim how they will go to,

Those who honour us, virgins and city men; lawyers and doctors; those who prohibit; those who deny; those who reverence without knowing why; those who praise without understanding; the still very numerous [...] tribe of the respectable; who prefer to see not; desire to know not; love the darkness; those still worship us, and with reason; for we have given them Wealth, Prosperity, Comfort, Ease. To them we go, you we leave. Come, Sisters, come! This is no place for us here (97).

I see the Lady of Modesty, Lady of Chastity, and Lady of Purity as symbols of the social, political and cultural discourse that construct the stable gender categories as we traditionally know them, and thus want to keep the illusion of a stable gender core

intact. They want to cover up the truth, as they want to “cover Orlando with their draperies” (96). We see in the above quote from *Orlando* that this view on gender are being maintained by “those who prohibit; those who deny; those who reverence without knowing why,” indicating that Woolf is very critical to those upholding the norms of society. Further, she indicates that these norms, in this case gender norms, are being upheld and reinforced on a false basis, and they are constantly being reproduced because no one questions their existence or their origin (“reverence without knowing why”). It seems like Woolf almost criticizes how most people (“the still very numerous”) are not questioning the fraught gender categories, because it is much easier to conform into one of the two categories available (“Comfort, Ease”), indicating that there exists a fear of the unintelligible, and thus we close our eyes for it; “they retire in haste, waving their draperies over their heads, as if to shut out something that they dare not look upon” (97).

Again, Woolf’s criticism is not stated directly, but rather implied through a personification of the forces she wishes to present. Sarah Hastings writes that,

This strategic personification of value traits allowed Woolf to allegorically present the cultural forces that actively sought to oppress divergent opinions regarding, and manifestations of, sex and gender (33).

By presenting her critique implicitly, and at such a fictionalized and, one could say, unrealistic level, Woolf succeeds in promoting a controversial view on gender without being censored. The degree of unlikelihood present in *Orlando*; the sudden change of gender, the ability to live through hundreds of years, probably made it easier to accept the novel, and to not see Woolf’s portrayal of gender as a real threat to the existing gender norms. As mentioned in the first chapter, Woolf wanted her novel to be “truthful but fantastic,” and the truthfulness in the novel is found in how Woolf is true to her own view of reality, gender, and the individual’s place in society.

Opposed to “the sisters” we find the personification of Truth. Truth becomes the “truth” about gender that Woolf wants to present in *Orlando*, a truth that in her fictionally created universe defeats the socially constructed gender illusion, something that would have been an impossibility in Woolf’s own time. Sarah Hastings also touches upon this aspect when she writes that,

Woolf recognized that the perceived dependence of gender determination upon biological sex

was ridiculous, yet temporally existed in an era that did not provide a fertile atmosphere to foster lasting substantial change with regards to the interpretation of sex and gender. In response to this environmental limitation, Woolf created a fictional atmosphere in which she could subvert the heteronormative assumptions and could effectively divorce gender from sex in its inherent construct within her works and in the lives of her protagonists (6-7).

To avoid the limitations of her present time, Woolf created her own universe in which she was able to reveal the gendered body as a construction, and to show that gender is not fixed, but rather fluid and ever-changing; a process of performances.

From *He* to *Their* to *She*

As Orlando finally awakes after his long sleep, the narrator describes how “he stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! We have no choice left but confess – he was a woman” (97). Woolf still uses the pronoun *he* even though technically, or rather physically and biologically, at this point Orlando is a she. This confusing use of pronouns continues as the narrator states that,

Orlando had become a woman – there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as *he* had been. The change of sex, though it altered *their* future, did nothing whatever to alter *their* identity (98).

Finally, a few sentences later, the narrator explains “in future we must, for convention’s sake, say ‘her’ for ‘his’, and ‘she’ for ‘he’” (98). By at first keeping the male pronoun, then using the plural *their*, before finally changing to *she*, I think Woolf wants to show that there is nothing absolute about Orlando’s gender identity. Certainly, she is now a female biologically, but there is still a presence of both genders in her, which the use of *their* signalizes. Esther Sanchez-Pardo Gonzales describes how,

Woolf’s use of plural is suspicious, because her hero has never lost his or her individuality. Orlando is not metamorphosed into two different beings, and Woolf is once more playing with the reader, since with the use of plurals she is indeed pointing to an androgynous being who is now revealing the feminine side that Orlando the man had been concealing in his behaviour (78).

The novel presents a rather modern view of the subject as made up by many selves, and consequently how it is impossible to categorize individuals after fraught categories. Orlando, the narrator states,

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 (213).

The genre of biography is unable to truly represent an individual, in the same way as it is impossible to define an individual after strictly determined categories, such as male or female, rather there needs to be room for nuances and transcendence. This implicit criticism of categorization is even more present in *Middlesex*, as will be shown in the next chapter.

I think the key idea that Woolf wants to present with Orlando's gender transformation is that gender does not determine a person's identity. Woolf implies that there exists no absolute gender identity prior to the acts which establish it, or, in Judith Butler's words: "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (*Gender Trouble* 34). It is said about Orlando after the transformation that he/she "remained precisely as he had been" (98), indicating that her identity and personality are precisely the same as a woman, as they were as a man. Through this, Woolf seems to share Butler's opinion that both sex and gender are culturally and socially constructed, and that there is no need to distinguish between the two. Even though Orlando's biological sex is changed, there is no change present in her until the external and socially produced gender norms work in on her, and construct her female gender identity. This can be linked to Butler's claim that "sex itself is a gendered category" (*Gender Trouble* 10). Further, it signalizes that gender is a gradual and temporal process, which one learns to perform through repeated acts. Turning to *Middlesex* in chapter three, we will see that this is relevant for Cal/lie as well, whose personality remains the same after his/her decision to go from female Callie to male Cal is realized.

Concluding Remarks

“Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever sine” (98).

Generally, *Orlando* is characterized with a great amount of play with, and mockery of, gender conventions. Both when Orlando is a man and when she is a woman, Woolf plays with what is considered stereotypical for each gender, and through this playfulness she challenges the stability of the binary categories of male and female, and further she shows that gender is not something absolute.

Even though *Orlando* in many ways is a mere fantasy, witty and humorous, there is also a more serious undertone present in Woolf’s portrayal of gender. Her implicit criticism of the restrictive nature of gender categories, and how society decides what is appropriate for each gender is seen in how Woolf lets Orlando inhabit characteristics of both genders at the same time. By creating a character that freely chooses gender attributes, and even switches gender, Woolf deconstructs gender, and shows how it is a social construction made up by acts, rather than an absolute core. Taking Woolf’s theoretical authorship into consideration one can certainly describe *Orlando* as a feminist text. As I have shown in this chapter, there are close links between the ideas Woolf presents in *A Room of Ones Own* and in *Orlando*. Sarah Hasting states how Woolf’s aim seems to be an androgynous harmony, as presented in the beginning of this chapter, where,

Characteristics and sexual attractions are individually and internally manifested, as opposed to the standard societal imposition of external expectations determined exclusively through the biological sexing of an individual (4).

We see that Woolf criticizes the socially created gender norms, and consequently society’s power to determine what is considered as intelligible genders. She seeks to break down the binary oppositions of male and female, and thus open for a freer way to construct one’s gender at an individual level.

Woolf presents a modern view on the individual as complex and fragmented, and she criticizes the need to determine individuals after fraught identity categories. By letting Orlando switch from the category of male to the category of female without any changes in Orlando’s personality, Woolf denies the existence of a male or female

gender core. The deconstruction of absolute categories is very much present in the ideas of Judith Butler as well. Gill Jagger describes how it is precisely because identity categories are “never fully determining” that there is room for change; “for the possibility of re-articulation of the categories, and hence social and self-transformation (Jagger 7). It is this room for change that Orlando exploits with his/her gender transformation, as he/she challenges, and thus breaks down, the fraught categories of male and female. This idea of resisting categorization will be looked at in more depth focusing on Cal/lie in *Middlesex* in the chapter to come, but it is nevertheless worth noticing the very modernity in Woolf’s portrayal of the complex individual that Orlando is.

The clearest example of gender performance in the novel is found in Woolf’s play with clothing and costumes. This element reveals the very arbitrariness of gender as the superficial feature of clothing constructs gender identities. Clothing is used both to strengthen the sense of a gender, and to make a gender more ambiguous, and even to perform a gender one does not belong to biologically. The use of clothing to construct gender is again an example of the cultural and social implications of gender, and it underlines Woolf’s view that gender is not something absolute.

Through the fantastic story of *Orlando*, Woolf seems in one way to want to escape the system of gender categorization and conventions existing in her day, but at the same time there is also a will to change, and a will to disrupt this system, present in the novel. On the surface, *Orlando* is a witty, humorous and parodic novel that plays with our conception of gender, but this play also contains a critical voice that wants to disrupt the idea of gender as something absolute, and challenge the rigid gender norms present at Woolf’s time.

CHAPTER 3: *Middlesex*

In this chapter, I will leave Virginia Woolf and *Orlando* behind, and turn to Jeffrey Eugenides's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Middlesex*. As I mentioned in the first chapter, *Orlando* and *Middlesex* can be seen as an odd choice of novels to compare, but even though they come from completely different authors, and from completely different periods, they both touch upon some of the same issues regarding gender, and that is after all my main focus in this thesis. This chapter will deal with how gender is portrayed in *Middlesex*, and as with *Orlando*, I will see the novel's treatment of gender in light of Judith Butler's theories. I will explore in what ways *Middlesex* challenges a traditional representation of gender, and how the novel in a way offers a new way of defining gender and identity. As I will show through the exploration of different themes dealt with in the novel, Eugenides criticizes categorical thinking when it comes to gender identity, and he seems to promote a broader acceptance for all individuals in society, something that is clearly present in Butler's work as well.

As hinted in the first chapter, *Orlando* and *Middlesex* are different in their treatment of gender as Orlando shifts between the two categories of male and female, whereas Cal/lie is positioned *in between* these two categories. Thus, Cal/lie's status as in between the category of male and the category of female will be central for the investigation of the portrayal of gender in *Middlesex*. Through Cal/lie's position in between, I will show how Eugenides presents an implicit critique of the fraught categories of gender identification, that is that one has to be either male *or* female. I will look into the concept of hybridity as a way of describing identities, and following this I will explore Cal/lie's gender hybridity, that is her physical condition of hermaphroditism. Further I will look at the role of language, and how for Cal/lie language becomes something painful, a place with no room for him/her, but also how language paradoxically becomes Cal's only way to constitute himself as a subject. The role of sexual desire and attraction are also explored in the novel, and it plays an important role in Callie's decision to live as a man. As a consequence, I will pay attention to how one's sexual desire constitutes one's sense of a gender identity, and consider whether Cal/lie's choice to live as male Cal challenges traditional gender categories, or if he rather ends up promoting heteronormativity. Callie's relationship

with the Obscure Object will be the main focus in the exploration of this issue. Additionally, I will pay attention to the role of physical appearance, and elements such as clothing, hair, and body gestures, in the creating of a gender identity, which, as explored in the previous chapter, is a central concept in *Orlando* as well. For *Middlesex*, this is especially relevant considering the transformation from female Callie to male Cal, and this element will thus be looked at in depth, and we will see that Eugenides presents a Butlerian view of gender as constructed through performance.

***Middlesex* and the Gender Debate**

Even though the transformation from Cal to Callie through performance indeed reveals gender as a social construction, *Middlesex* also shows that there is something basic to one's gender, a natural drive in Cal that he cannot control, and that is sexual desire. We will see in this chapter that Callie's choice to live as Cal is based on his/her sexuality, and his/her feelings of attraction and desire towards women. Through this one can say that Eugenides presents a view on gender that puts nature and biology as prime determiners for one's gender identity, but to simply state that Eugenides favors nature, and leave it there would be to simplify how *Middlesex* portrays the creation of gender identity, and the debate surrounding it. Callie's choice to become male is based on his/her natural sexual drive, but the process of becoming Cal nevertheless reveals the performativity of gender, and thus it shows how the gender categories are social constructions, as will be evident throughout this chapter.

As *Middlesex*'s protagonist Cal/lie is in between genders, Eugenides positions himself in between the oppositions of nature versus nurture in the debate about what is creating gender. Through Cal, Eugenides presents to us the changing climate in the gender debate from the 1970s and onwards. Cal states how in the seventies,

The consensus was that personality was primarily determined by environment, each child a blank slate to be written on [...]. For a little while during the seventies it seemed that sexual difference might pass away (479).

This period was, however, followed by the introduction of evolutionary biology: "under its sway the sexes were separated again, men into hunters and women into

gatherers. Nurture no longer formed us; nature did” (478). Cal himself, however, states that he does not fit any of these theories: “not the evolutionary biologist’s and not Luce’s either. My psychological makeup doesn’t accord with the essentialism popular in the intersex movement, either” (479). Through Cal’s inability to fit into a specific theory, or a specific category, Eugenides’s novel presents a critique of categorical thinking, and a critique of our understanding of identity and gender identity, which will be an overall issue explored in this chapter. It is also through this critique of the fraught categories constructed by society that Eugenides takes on Judith Butler’s ideas: they both ask us to question this categorization, and the gender norms constantly reinforced by society, and through this they wish to broaden our understanding and create a space for those not fitting in so that the unintelligibility of their existence might come to an end. Eugenides seems to share one of Butler’s main hopes, which she presents in the introduction to *Gender Trouble*:

I continue to hope for a coalition of sexual minorities that will transcend the simple categories of identity, that will refuse the erasure of bisexuality, that will counter and dissipate the violence imposed by restrictive bodily norms. I would hope that such a coalition would be based on the irreducible complexity of sexuality and its implication in various dynamics of discursive and institutional power, and that no one will be too quick to reduce power to hierarchy and to refuse its productive political dimensions (xxvii).

The wish to “transcend the simple categories of identity” is in my opinion also what Cal/lie wants to do in *Middlesex*, and whether he/she succeeds in this or not, and in what ways, plays an important part in my exploration of the portrayal of gender in *Middlesex*.

Cal/lie – A Hybrid Identity

“We’re all made up of many parts, other halves. Not just me” (440).

As already mentioned, *Middlesex* was published in a completely different period of time than *Orlando*. Eugenides’s novel was written when feminist criticism had become an established field, and Judith Butler a prominent contributor. Further, the postmodern era saw a decline in traditional identity markers such as ethnicity and gender, and the focus was rather on the individuals and their possibilities. It was no

longer impossible – at least not in theory – to transcend categories, and for instance mix different ethnicities and genders in one individual without automatic ostracism. In the essay “Of Self and Country: U.S. Politics, Cultural Hybridity, and Ambivalent Identity in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*,” Francisco Collado-Rodriguez points to the environment in which *Middlesex* was created, stating that,

Jeffrey Eugenides’s second novel, *Middlesex* [...], may be singled out as an example of the type of contemporary literature that sides with the hybrid in the ideological struggle against artificial limits imposed by categorical thinking (73).

The critique of categorical thinking present in *Middlesex* is precisely one of my main points of discussion in this chapter, and following this I will just briefly look closer at the term *hybrid* that Collado-Rodriguez uses in the above quote.

The Hybrid

Hybrid, meaning literally “something that is the product of mixing two or more different things” (OED online) is especially relevant when it comes to hybrid ethnicity, which has become more and more common in a postmodern and postcolonial world. Nationality is no longer the primary feature to determine an identity, something Cal recognizes in *Middlesex* as well, stating that “you used to be able to tell a person's nationality by the face. Immigration ended that” (40). The term hybridity is also a central concept in postcolonial theory, and in this context it is often associated with Homi K. Bhabha who,

Uses the term to stress the interdependence of colonizer and colonized, and to therefore argue that one cannot claim a ‘purity’ of racial or national identity. All identity, he maintains, is produced in a kind of third space, which is ‘in between’ the subject and their idealized other (Oxford Reference Online).

This definition of hybridity is perhaps best applied to hybrid ethnicity in a colonial and postcolonial context, but I will nevertheless argue that Cal/lie’s identity also is produced in “a kind of third space,” that is the space between the category of male and the category of female.

What is most relevant for my thesis, however, is that hybridity clearly questions the concept of a fixed core identity, a view on identity that is also presented

by Judith Butler, and by Jeffrey Eugenides in *Middlesex*. In her thesis “Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*,” Anika Gotje quotes Gloria Anzaldua who describes how “the hybrid has a greater gene pool, is therefore stronger, more adaptable and has the advantage of being in-between. At the same time, being hybrid does not come without pain” (Gotje 23). That being hybrid does not come without pain applies very well to Cal/lie, but his/her hybridity is, however, not characterized by a greater gene pool, rather his/her limited gene pool is the cause of Cal/lie’s gender hybridity, as the incestuous relationship between Cal/lie’s grandparents is the reason for her hermaphroditism. When it comes to ethnicity, Cal/lie is “purely” Greek, but because he/she grows up in America, and thus is surrounded by American culture; her cultural ethnicity becomes somewhat hybrid. I will, however, not pay much attention to Cal/lie’s ethnic background, but it is worth mentioning how Eugenides constantly links Cal/lie’s “Greekness” to her present status as a hermaphrodite in America. Cal/lie’s identity is made up of many components: his/her Greek background is mixed together with his/her present life in America, he/she is influenced by Greek grandparents, and American friends, and in the novel he/she struggles to find a way to balance Greek traditions with a modern American lifestyle. Through constantly linking and intertwining different identity markers, Eugenides constructs a complex protagonist showing that one’s identity cannot be limited to one separate category, Cal/lie is not simply Greek *or* American, or male *or* female, but rather a mix of all of them.

To be a hybrid culturally or ethnically is very common in the beginning of the 21st century, but Cal/lie’s hybridity is far more complicated as he/she is a hybrid also when it comes to gender. Cal/lie is a hermaphrodite, or intersexual: “a person or animal (really or apparently) having both male and female sex organs,” (OED online) which means that biologically and physically Cal/lie is both male *and* female. If we compare Cal’s status with that of Orlando, they both challenge the idea of the stable categories of male and female, but where Orlando is shifting from one category to the other, consciously exploiting his/her knowledge of both genders, Cal/lie’s gender position is literally *in between* male and female, and thus he/she is perhaps closer to the androgynous ideal described by Virginia Woolf in the previous chapter. The “in between-ness” of Cal/lie is, however, mainly explored through his/her physical condition, the appearance of his/her genitals, and his/her sexual experiences and

desires. In the following paragraphs I will therefore look into the condition of hermaphroditism, both in general and how it is portrayed in *Middlesex* through Cal/lie's discovery of him/herself during puberty. I will investigate how Eugenides, through the portrayal of Cal/lie's condition, challenges the traditional idea of gender as consisting of the category of male and the category of female only, and further how he promotes a greater understanding for those not fitting into the existing categories of gender identification.

To Be In Between: Hermaphroditism and Intersexuality

“That’s me exactly. The few” (232).

The precise medical condition of Cal/lie is “male pseudohermaphrodite – genetically male but appearing otherwise, with 5-alpha-reductase deficiency syndrome,” (413) but before looking at Cal/lie's condition in detail, I will just briefly introduce the condition of hermaphroditism in general. Anne Fausto-Sterling presents in her book *Sexing the Body* a historical account of the condition of hermaphroditism and the existence of intersex individuals. I will not report the historical account in detail, but to sum up, Fausto-Sterling states that “intersexuality is old news” (32). Through her investigation, Fausto-Sterling shows that hermaphrodites and intersex people were acknowledged in society to a greater extent in the past (31). Reaching the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, however, biology emerged as an organized discipline, and from this followed the “authority to declare that certain bodies were abnormal and in need of correction” (Fausto-Sterling 36). Further, the gradual development of medical technology made it possible to correct “nature's mistake,” and through this “hermaphrodites were beginning to disappear” (Fausto-Sterling 38). Through a new system of categorization, hermaphroditism was erased, and those few who were truly hermaphrodites were made to fit into either the category of male or female through correcting surgery.

The fact that hermaphrodites were accepted to a greater extent in the past shows that our idea of intelligible genders, and that gender should be defined as either male or female, is socially constructed through time by powerful discourses in society. Fausto-Sterling states that one of the major claims of *Sexing the Body* is “that

labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision” (3). We see that Fausto-Sterling shares Butler’s view that the “apparently foundational categories [that is male and female] are actually cultural products that ‘create the effect of the natural, the original, the inevitable’” (Jagger 18). They both ask that we should question the present status of gender categorization, and further question who it is that determines this categorization, and why this categorization is believed to be natural, and thus constantly reinforced. Eugenides also, through Cal/lie, asks: if female and male are the only categories available, why do people like Cal/lie exist? Since biology creates individuals that do not belong to either the category of male or the category of female, these categories must necessary be culturally, *not* biologically or naturally, created. The paradox here, however, is that for intelligible genders to exist, there needs to exist unintelligible genders that the norm of male and female can be defined in opposition to; the normal produces the “not-normal,” and vice versa.

Genital Surgery: To Make the Unintelligible Intelligible

In *Sexing the Body*, Fausto-Sterling also presents a rather critical view of the practice of medical surgery to make unintelligible genders fit into the intelligible genders of either male or female, an issue which is explored in *Middlesex* as well. She argues that “the medical ‘cure’ for intersexuality frequently does more damage than good” (Fausto-Sterling 80). She criticizes the fact that the goal of infant genital surgery is a social result: to fit into the two-sex system, and further that the criterion for success is cosmetic, not focusing on for instance psychological health and the ability to function sexually pleasurably (Fausto-Sterling 80). The focus on looking normal is related to the concept of interpellation and hailing coined by Louis Althusser which I presented in chapter one. In order to be hailed, and thus constituted as a subject, one needs to be recognized as either male *or* female, and in order to be recognized one must look “normal.”

The obsession with normality concerning gender appearance is also touched upon by Judith Butler. Brady and Schirato present Butler’s view on the creation of the subject, stating that in order to be recognized as a subject, “one must be recognizable and explicable within a particular grid of intelligibility that makes subjects appear, and authorizes the subject’s status as an identity-in-waiting” (6). In *Undoing Gender*,

Butler explains this further, presenting the case of “the locker room,” which underlines the importance of looking normal: individuals should feel comfortable getting undressed in a locker room, and consequently the physical appearance of the genitals is top priority for a genital surgery (63-64). We are presented to the locker room in *Middlesex* as well, and it is indeed a painful place for Callie. Surrounded by all these girls that are growing into women, Callie becomes aware that she is different. To avoid being recognized as unintelligible, something not female, and not entirely male either, Callie avoids getting naked in front of her schoolmates (299). She does not want to expose herself to the gaze of the other girls, and thus make them able to define her as unintelligible.

Dr. Money and David - Cal/lie and Dr. Luce

To further highlight the problematic nature of genital correcting surgery, I will briefly present the case of David Reimer, which is an example of the consequences of such surgery. The reason I want to focus on this case is because Dr. Luce in *Middlesex*, the gender specialist Callie sees in New York, shares many similarities with the real-life character of Dr. John Money, the doctor responsible for David Reimer. In both cases we see how the doctors are unable to see the human being behind the object of scientific interest, and how a scientific approach to gender wipes out the possibility for difference to exist.

Bruce (later David) Reimer was born a healthy baby boy, but during a circumcision his penis was seriously damaged, and unable to function “normally,” Bruce consequently underwent surgery to get female genitals, and his parents raised him as a girl, Brenda. The doctor responsible for the David Reimer case, Dr. John Money, was a specialist in gender identity and sexual disorders. The case of David Reimer was one of Dr. Money’s most famous cases, and it was allegedly supporting his theory that gender was socially learned, rather than biologically present from birth, and the success with the David Reimer case became Dr. Money’s prime evidence for this theory. It turned out, however, that the David Reimer case was not such a success after all. David had never felt comfortable as Brenda, and reaching puberty he/she became seriously depressed, which led his/her parents to tell Brenda the truth about his/her gender identity. This revelation made Brenda quit his/her

treatment of feminine hormones, and choosing to live as male David. David got married, and for some time lived a rather “successful” life as a man, but his life ended tragically in suicide in 2004 (Frelich Appleton 395-396).

In *Middlesex* we can easily spot similarities between Dr. John Money and Callie’s doctor, Dr. Luce. As with Dr. Money, Dr. Luce argues that gender does not exist before birth, but rather that “gender identity is established very early on in life” and “imprinted in the brain during childhood, never disappearing. Children learn to speak Male or Female the way they learn to speak English or French” (411). In the case of David Reimer, Dr. Money has been criticized for allegedly using David (and his twin brother) merely as scientific objects and research material, which is also how the relationship between Dr. Luce and Callie is portrayed in *Middlesex*. Describing Dr. Luce’s reaction to their first meeting, Callie states how,

He [Dr. Luce] was trying to act casual, but I could see he was excited, I was an extraordinary case, after all. He was taking his time, savoring me. To a scientist like Luce I was nothing less than a sexual or genetic Kaspar Hauser (408).

Callie also describes how Luce shows her off to the other doctors, almost proclaiming: “here she is. My star attraction” (420). For Dr. Luce, Cal/lie is nothing more than an object, and a way for him to promote his theories about sex and gender identity, just as Bruce/Brenda was for Dr. Money. Additionally, for both Dr. Money and Dr. Luce the issues surrounding David and Callie become solely medical, and thus something that could easily be corrected through a surgical procedure: “they acted as though my problem was medical and therefore fixable” (405). Dr. Luce seemed to believe that this surgical procedure also would change the patient’s gender identity automatically: “the surgery will make Callie look exactly like the girl she feels herself to be. In fact, she will be that girl. Her outside and inside will conform” (428). The problem with Dr. Luce’s and Dr. Money’s view on gender, however, is that it leaves no room for nuances; for “in between-ness.” By making Callie refuse genital surgery, Eugenides presents a critique of this practice that forces the so-called unintelligible genders to conform to the intelligible categories of male or female.

By creating the character of Cal/lie, I think Eugenides wants to give voice to someone inhabiting a space in between, and describe the painfulness of not being either/or, but rather both (or nothing), in a society demanding that you belong to an

intelligible gender if you want to be recognized as a subject. Hence, the following paragraphs will consider how Cal/lie's position as in between male and female leaves him/her without a language in which he/she can be defined, and further how language has the authority to define Cal/lie as unintelligible. I will, however, also focus on how Cal/lie, through telling his/her story, takes back language. He tries to create a space for him/herself, a space for those in between, and through this Cal's narration becomes a way of protesting against that language which render him as unintelligible.

The Power of Language

"I've never had the right words to describe my life" (217).

As I touched upon above as well, society, law, and politics almost demand that you belong to either the category of male or the category of female in order to have rights as a human being, at least politically and juridically. Basically, the hermaphrodite must conform either to the category of male or to that of female to be rendered intelligible, and thus constituted as a subject. Turning to Althusser and the concept of interpellation for instance, there is a premise that the individual is recognizable in order to be hailed, and as the first thing in life one must be recognizable as either a boy or a girl.

Relevant to the concept of interpellation as a way to constitute the subject, is the importance of being able to tell the parents what gender their newborn baby is. Callie explains that,

You did not tell the parents of a newborn, "Your baby is a hermaphrodite." Instead, you said, "Your daughter was born with a clitoris that is a little larger than a normal girl's. We'll need to do surgery to make it the right size" (413).

This point is also explored by Fausto-Sterling who states that one does not use the term hermaphrodite but instead other medical terms "that indicate that intersex children are just unusual in some aspect of their physiology, *not* that they constitute a category other than male or female" (51). In the case of *Middlesex*, this practice is also used by Dr. Luce. In his first meeting with Callie and her parents, where he does not know which gender is prevailing in Callie yet, Dr. Luce avoids using pronouns: "the doctor hadn't said my name, for instance. He hadn't said 'Calliope' or 'Callie'.

He hadn't said 'daughter', either. He didn't use any pronouns at all" (414). As Cal/lie is in between female and male, Dr. Luce is unable to hail her/him because there is no name available for what Cal/lie is. After Cal/lie's interview sessions and examinations, however, Luce hails him/her as a girl: "let me review the facts of your *daughter's* case" (426). Not wanting to acknowledge that intersexuals belong to a third category underlines how our way of thinking is founded on the separate categories of male and female, and further it shows that hermaphroditism is indeed a threat to the stability of categories, and thus the condition needs to be silenced.

The use of words and language, or rather the lack of a language, related to Cal/lie's condition is present on several occasions in *Middlesex*. Even though Callie is hailed into life as a female through "pink ribboned cigars," (17) with Dr. Philobosian claiming: "a beautiful, healthy girl," (216) her birth also coincides with Lefty losing the ability to speak: "when he tried to ask whether the baby was a boy or a girl, he found he was unable to speak" (217). Lefty's speechlessness can be a symbol of the lack of words existing to define Cal/lie's condition, and further it keeps the secret about his and Desdemona's incestuous relationship, which is the cause for Cal/lie's hermaphroditism. Dr. Philobosian, again being linked to Cal/lie's Greek background, has failing eyesight and is therefore responsible for the fact that Cal/lie's condition remains unexplored throughout her childhood. After Cal/lie's condition is discovered, he/she hears Milton exclaim about Philobosian: "I can't believe he missed something like that," Callie then in turn asks "Like what? I silently asked the wall, but it didn't specify," again underlining how hermaphroditism is a tabooed condition one does not talk about. Philobosian's inability to recognize Callie's ambiguous genitals underlines the importance of being recognized by others in order to be constituted as a subject.

It is not only the lack of words and a language that surrounds Cal/lie in *Middlesex*. Eugenides also focuses on the authority of language, and language's power of definition. We see that words become powerful signifiers, and a source of authority which has the power to define who Cal/lie is, or rather not define him/her at all. This is explored when Callie looks up her condition in *the Webster Dictionary*, which leads her to the word monster. Callie describes how "the synonym was official, authoritative; it was the verdict that the culture gave on a person like her" (431). What Callie was, was either silenced, or she was reduced to something non-human; a *monster*. For Cal/lie, language becomes authoritative; something that has power to

define him/her, or worse, it becomes a place where there is no room for *something* like him/her. Consequently, language and voices become a source of fear for young Callie: “the humming of my parent’s voices from behind my bedroom wall, which throughout my childhood had filled me with a sense of security, had now become a source of anxiety and panic” (329).

Narration as Resistance

In the above paragraphs, I have explored how language and words become a source of anxiety and pain for Cal/lie, as he/she experiences that there is no room for him/her in language, no words available to define who he/she is. I would argue, however, that through the structure of *Middlesex*, that is Cal’s narration and Cal’s representation of his “impossible life,” (302) Cal/lie takes back language, and uses language as a way to establish him/herself as a subject, and consequently resists the categorization forced upon him/her. The following paragraphs will thus look closer at how Eugenides, through Cal’s narration, after all establishes a place for Cal/lie. Further, drawing lines to Butler, I will also explore how Cal’s narration is a way of performing the self and presenting the subject as processual, constantly developing.

It is paradoxical that language becomes a place where there originally is no room for Cal/lie, but throughout the novel, language is also the only chance Cal has to represent himself, and thus establish his identity. Elizabeth Piastra touches upon this paradox when she in “Narrating Identity in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*” states that,

The reader is confronted with the paradox that though Cal considers language to be inadequate to describe his experience, it is the language of the narrative that allows him to communicate his story to others and that produces meaning (Piastra 3).

Cal himself also describes this paradox stating that “I’ve never had the right words to describe my life, and now that I’ve entered my story, I need them more than ever” (217). The solution can be nothing else than to narrate his own story, and in that way create a language where he himself can find the right words, or at least try. Through narrating his own story, he constructs himself as a subject, and thus creates a space for his own existence.

One of the main themes in *Middlesex* is precisely storytelling, and the novel's hybrid nature suggests how an individual's story is a very complex tale. Like *Orlando*, *Middlesex* focuses on the difficulties of representing an individual through language, but where Orlando is represented through another voice, Cal/lie tells his/her own story. Eugenides has stated in an interview that "the book, like its hermaphroditic narrator, was meant to be a hybrid. Part third-person epic, part first-person coming of age tale" (Shostak 384). This quote touches upon the uniqueness of *Middlesex*'s narrative technique: the novel is both a representation of how the grown-up Cal sees his life in retrospection, and how the young Callie, and later Cal, experience life as it happens. *Middlesex* is clearly about someone wanting to tell his/her story and by doing so, tries to establish him/herself as a subject and create an identity. This innate need to define oneself is probably even more present in Cal/lie as his/her identity is so fragmented. The narration becomes a firm ground to which he/she can attach a sense of self and collect all the traces which makes up his/her complex identity. Cal expresses a need to write his story no matter what: "I don't care if I write a great book anymore, but just one which, whatever its flaws, will leave a record of my impossible life" (302).

Cal – A Reliable Narrator?

Cal's story, and thus his language, is the only way we can get a sense of Cal/lie's identity, but there is also always a possibility of Cal being an unreliable narrator. Since it is Cal that controls the narration, he is free to construct his identity in accordance with how he wants himself to be seen. As he states himself: "from here on in, everything I'll tell you is colored by the subjective experience of being part of events" (217). The fact that Cal himself is aware of his own subjectivity, and additionally makes the reader aware of it, gives us in a sense a greater reason to believe him. This is also evident when Cal admits how he, as Callie, manipulates the story of his/her life in the task given him/her by Dr. Luce. Cal describes how "on that Smith Corona I quickly discovered that telling the truth wasn't nearly as much fun as making things up. I also knew that I was writing for an audience – Dr. Luce – and that if I seemed normal enough, he might send me back home" (418). When writing about her life to Dr. Luce, Callie succeeds in creating a picture of that "all-American daughter my parents wanted me to be," both through writing about "my deep feeling

for nature” and “crushes on boys,” but also stylistic characteristics such as “Victorian flourishes, [...] antique diction,” and “girl’s school propriety” (418). To us readers, Cal/lie admits that he/she manipulates both his/her life story, and the language he/she uses in the piece written for Dr. Luce. Precisely because of this honesty, I choose to believe that the story Cal presents to us readers is a true account of his/her life. For Dr. Luce, Callie *does* construct a picture of herself that is in accordance with what she thinks the audience will expect, and the fact that she admits this gives Cal’s retrospective account a greater sense of reliability.

Further, It can also be problematic that the story of Cal/lie, the story of both a girl and a boy, is told in retrospect by male Cal, and following this *Middlesex* has been criticized for ending up promoting heteronormativity and masculinity. In “Retrospective Sex: Rewriting Intersexuality in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*,” Rachel Carroll states how,

The retrospective narrative strategies employed by Eugenides in *Middlesex* make it impossible for the reader to access Cal’s experience as a teenage girl other than through the adult male Cal’s self-consciously knowing hindsight; Cal’s female adolescence is mediated by the adult Cal’s conviction in his genetically sexed identity as male (196).

Carroll seems to argue that Cal’s narration is unable to represent the true experiences of teenage girl Callie because it is told from a perspective where Cal knows that he has been male all along. I will argue, however, that it seems like Carroll is not taking into consideration that Cal and Callie are in fact the same person, and the experiences of teenage Callie are also the experiences of grown-up Cal. It is not like Callie is erased as soon as Cal emerged: “did Calliope have to die in order to make room for Cal,” asks Cal. I would argue that the answer is no, as Cal follows up by stating that “in most ways I remained the person I have always been” (520). That Callie is still present as a part of Cal’s identity can also be seen in how Cal describes his own narration:

All I know is this: despite my androgenized brain, there’s an innate feminine circularity in the story I have to tell. In any genetic history. I’m the final clause in a periodic sentence, and that sentence begins a long time ago, in another language, and you have to read it from the beginning to get to the end, which is my arrival (20).

Cal shows how his story is just as much the story of Callie, the girl he was, and still carries with him, as it is the story of male Cal. To tell the story of an individual, you need to include all bits and parts that together make up a complex wholeness.

Again, the resistance against conforming to separate categories is evident: certainly, Cal does define himself as male, but the feminine presence of Callie signals that he does not want to neglect the female category fully. There are several examples of how Cal describes that this presence of male *and* female has always been a part of him. About his/her fetal existence, Cal states that,

Right next to him, there's me, his sometime sister, my face already a conundrum, flashing like a lenticular decal between two images: the dark eyed pretty little girl I used to be; and the severe, aquiline-nosed, Roman-coinish person I am today (199).

Cal's story can never be complete without the inclusion of Callie, and thus they are both part of the complex identity that makes up the Cal we are presented to in *Middlesex*. Precisely because Cal does not repress his femininity, and precisely because he does not refuse to acknowledge Callie as a part of him, I would argue that Cal does not end up promoting heteronormativity exclusively.

Narration as Performance

As Cal's narration and consequently the structure of *Middlesex* are constantly developing, so I will argue that Cal/lie's identity develops with the story. Elizabeth Piastra claims that Eugenides's representation of Cal is a portrait of a fluid identity, and that this identity remains fluid until the novel's very end. Piastra describes how "Cal's story is that of one of the so-called 'others' in society, and yet, his narrative is a search for origin and a journey of self-discovery in which the social constructions of normality and otherness are revealed" (Piastra 2). Through Cal's narration, Eugenides presents, as I have mentioned before, identity as a very complex matter, and something that cannot be defined based on one single category. Just like Cal's narration is constantly changing with changes in his/her life, his/her identity is also constantly changing throughout, showing that one's identity, in this case one's gender identity, is a temporal process, constantly reinventing itself. Piastra states that "Cal demonstrates that identity is fluid, changing with every experience and that one can be 'other' even to oneself" (Piastra 3). It is through the narration that Cal creates

his/her identity; through experience, and thus through *doing*. Piastra argues, in opposition to Carroll, that “the story is Callie’s as much as it is Cal the protagonist’s and Cal the narrator’s” (6). The processual nature of *Middlesex*’s style, helps underlining the processual nature of Cal/lie’s identity, and the willingness to accept both others and oneself as different, *other*. For Cal, this involves both the acceptance of himself and other’s acceptance of him as “the same child, only different” (361).

The act of establishing and creating one’s identity through narration can also be linked to Butler’s idea of performativity. Narration is an act that constantly reinvents itself, changing with every new experience; it is something one performs. The very last line of Cal’s narration is also a sign of how the subject is constantly changing, and developing through a never-ending process. Cal, standing outside of Middlesex during his father’s funeral, describes how “I stood in the door for an hour, maybe two. I lost track after a while, happy to be home, weeping for my father, and thinking about what was next” (529). Even though Cal’s story ends here for now, there will always be something that is *next*, meaning that as long as he lives, Cal will develop, change and re-invent himself as a subject. Eugenides’s overall theme of the complex individual; an individual constantly developing, is underlined by the representation of Cal’s narration as an ongoing and never-ending process, and thus the very style of *Middlesex* highlights one of the novel’s main themes.

Physicality and Sexuality

“Desire made me cross over to the other side” (479).

As mentioned before, the clearest evidence of “in between-ness,” otherness, in Cal/lie is found in his/her physicality, more precisely his/her genitals, and sexuality, and in the following paragraphs I will explore this in more depth. We see in the novel that Cal/lie’s discovery of his/her true self coincides with the discovery of his/her genitals during puberty and his/her sexual awakening together with the Obscure Object.

The silence I have described as surrounding Cal/lie’s condition as a hermaphrodite is also present when it comes to his/her genitals in particular. Cal thinks back at his/her childhood and recounts how “Chapter Eleven’s apparatus was

called a 'pitzzi'. But for what I had there was no word at all" (226). At this point there is no suspicion surrounding Callie's gender identity, and her genitals are believed to be exclusively female. For us readers, however, these hints become apparent because the story is told in retrospect. We know what is to come; we know the true nature of Cal/lie's gender identity, and thus these small hints that might have been overlooked if the story had been told chronologically by a third person narrator, become significant for our understanding of Cal/lie's identity. Through Cal's retrospective narration, Eugenides foreshadows the revelation of Cal/lie's true gender identity, a revelation we readers anticipate.

Even though we know about Cal/lie's ambiguous gender identity from the very beginning, Callie as a young girl does not question her own gender until she (finally) reaches puberty. For Callie, the first hint that she is not like the other girls is her late blooming, leading her to faking her period to not create any suspicion. When Callie finally experiences some changes in her body, it is not femininity that manifests itself in her, but rather Cal in retrospect accounts how,

I began to exude some kind of masculinity, in the way I tossed up and caught my eraser, for instance, or in the way I dive-bombed people's desserts with my spoon, in the intensity of my knit brow or my eagerness to debate anyone on anything in class (304).

We see that Cal/lie's masculine identity slowly appears through the performance of acts typically associated with the male gender. His/her gender identity is thus manifesting slowly through time, through small acts signaling masculinity, which ultimately leads to the discovery of his/her true gender identity.

Cal/lie's Genitals: "A Kind of Crocus"

For teenage Callie, the discovery of him/herself coincides with the increasing awareness of his/her genitals and their function. Eugenides uses images of both femininity and masculinity when describing Callie's genitals, underlining their ambiguous nature. Her genitals are at first described using feminine terms illustrating fertility and growth: "a kind of crocus itself, just before flowering. A pink stem pushing up through dark new moss," (329) before "the crocus" is described as masculine, almost like a penis: "it had its dormant winter when it slept underground. Five minutes later, it stirred in a private springtime" (330). Finally, the genitals are

described as both soft and hard, feminine *and* masculine at the same time: “the crocus sometimes felt soft and slippery, like the flesh of a worm. At other times it was hard as a root” (330). These descriptions of his/her genitals underlines how Cal/lie is physically situated in between the two genders. Even though we readers know the outcome of Callie’s ambiguous gender identity, Callie as a teenage girl is unable to understand who she really is; all she knows is that she is different. When words fail to describe the development that takes place in Callie, she finds comfort in the graffiti at the school’s public toilet:

I started reading the walls [...] men with dinky penises; and women with penises too. It was an education both in what was and what might be [...] where else would a girl like me, hiding from the world a knowledge she didn’t quite understand herself – where else would she feel more comfortable than in this subterranean realm where people wrote down what they couldn’t say, where they gave voice to their most shameful longings and knowledge (329).

These obscene drawings become a language that challenges the “normal” language that only has room for male *or* female. In the secluded space of the school’s toilet, Callie discovers a language in which there is room for someone like her/him as well, a place where the “unrepresentable” also is represented.

Callie’s Sexual Identity

As Callie slowly enters into puberty, she also gradually develops intimate and sexual feelings for other girls. The first hint of Callie’s homosexuality (or, what really is heterosexuality) is presented in Eugenides’s portrayal of the friendship between Callie and the neighbor girl Clementine Stark, and it is further explored in Callie’s relationship with the Obscure Object. I will thus in the following paragraphs focus on Callie’s love interests and experiences with sex as a teenage girl, and how Cal/lie’s sexual desire is a determining factor in his/her choice to live as male Cal.

As hinted above, the first portrayal of homosexual desire in the novel is found in the relationship between Callie and Clementine Stark. After moving into Middlesex, Callie befriends the neighbor girl, Clementine, who is the first girl with whom Callie has an intimate experience. Sharing their first kiss, Callie describes how the world was going silent, “all silent, as Clementine’s highly educated, eight year old lips met mine. And then, somewhere below this, my heart reacting,” moving

“between two elements: one, excitement; the other, fear” (265). The fact that Callie feels fear together with excitement signals that she understands that what she feels is considered a taboo, and that her feelings are somewhat forbidden. These feelings are further explored when Callie and Clementine take a bath together:

I fall between her legs, I fall on top of her, we sink... and then we're twirling, spinning in the water, me on top, then her, then me, and giggling, and making bird cries [...]. Various submerged softnesses on Clementine's body are delivering crucial information to mine, information I store away but won't understand until years later (266).

Callie obviously feels some kind of sexual arousal with Clementine, but she is too young to understand the meaning of this. What she understands, however, is that what they are doing, or more importantly what she is feeling as a consequence of these acts, is forbidden, and she thus feels shameful when she discovers that her grandfather is sitting in the same room: “I am too stunned to move or speak. How long has he been there?” (266). However, Callie's secret remains with Lefty as her intimate experience with Clementine coincides with Lefty having a stroke. Again, Lefty is deprived of the possibility to speak about Cal/lie's unintelligibility, underlining the taboo surrounding Cal/lie's sexual desires: they must be silenced.

It is, however, with *The Obscure Object* that Callie has her real sexual awakening, and consequently the discovery of herself, and at this time she is able to better understand what it is that she is feeling. The spring when Callie falls in love with the *Obscure Object* coincides with her own blooming: “for that spring, while the crocuses bloomed, while the headmistress checked on the daffodil bulbs in the flower beds, Calliope, too, felt something budding. An obscure object all her own” (329). Callie's entering into puberty releases a well of feelings inside her, and those feelings become strongly directed towards the *Obscure Object*. Sitting next to the *Obscure Object*, Callie describes how “my nervous system launched into ‘Flight of the Bumblebee.’ The violins were sawing away in my spine. The timpani were banging my chest” (326). It is thus clear that Callie had strong affectionate feelings towards the *Obscure Object*, but what really makes Callie discover her true identity is her sexual experimentation together with the *Obscure Object*, and this will be my focus in the paragraphs to come.

“Sex was Happening”: Callie and the Obscure Object

As already mentioned, I want to pay attention to sexuality in *Middlesex* because it is a, if not *the*, determining factor for Callie choosing to live as male Cal: “desire made me cross over to the other side. Desire and the facticity of my body” (479). Precisely because the Obscure Object was Callie’s first real love interest, and the first person with whom she practiced sex pleurably, I will explore their relationship in more depth, and further show how it was a crucial factor in relation to both Callie’s discovery of her true self, and her decision to refuse genital surgery.

First of all, Callie’s revelation of her sexual identity takes place when she for the first time has what looks like heterosexual intercourse with the Obscure Object’s brother, Jerome. Having sex with Jerome, Callie inhabits the role of the passive female, at the same time as she imagines herself slipping into the body of Rex Reese as he kisses and touches the Obscure Object, thus taking on the active male role legitimizing her lesbian desires for the Obscure Object: “I saw them; I touched them; and since it wasn’t me who did this but Rex Reese I didn’t have to feel guilty, didn’t have to ask myself if I was having unnatural desires” (375). Callie’s practice of her sexual desire for the Obscure Object through Reese is followed by a revelation of the status of her sexuality and physicality as she has sex with Jerome:

Jerome knew what I was, as suddenly I did, too, for the first time clearly understood that I wasn’t a girl but something in between. I knew this from how natural it had felt to enter Rex Reese’s body, *how right it felt*, and I knew this from the shocked expression on Jerome’s face (375).

For Callie it felt more right to inhabit Rex Reese’s body, and perform masculine heterosexuality, than to be the passive female in the sexual act with Jerome. Callie and Jerome’s affair ends with this painful intercourse, and instead Callie and the Obscure Object start their sexual affair, a relationship that both reinforces and challenges heteronormativity.

The reason I would argue that Callie and the Obscure Object reinforce heteronormativity is because their believed-to-be homosexual affair is practiced through the performance of heterosexuality. As when entering Rex Reese’s body to legitimize her desire, Callie is also performing the role of the active male during the lovemaking between the Obscure Object and her. Callie is the one carefully taking the

initiative: “slowly, trying not to make a sound, I moved closer to her,” (383) and, with minimal contribution from The Obscure Object, dares to take the final step: “I hooked my fingers in the waistband of her underpants. I began to slip them off. Just then, the Object lifted her hips, very slightly, to make it easier for me. This was her only contribution” (384).

For most of the time, the Obscure Object is described as almost unconscious: “the Object might have been drugged or comatose,” (383) or as sleeping: “she was like somebody having a dirty dream, confusing her pillow for a lover” (387). Thus by letting Callie perform the active part, the Obscure Object becomes the passive female, and consequently their relationship mirrors a heterosexual one. Rachel Carroll also points to this in her article “Retrospective Sex: Rewriting Intersexuality in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*” claiming that “just as the Obscure Object acts out a feminine sexual passivity as a way of normalizing her same-sex desires, Cal acts out a masculine heterosexual activity in order to normalize her desires” (199). Through this, we see that both Callie and the Obscure Object try to conform to what Butler describes as intelligible genders. Acting as either the passive female or the active male they conform to the norm of heterosexual desire.

In spite of what I have explored above I will argue that there is also a challenge of intelligible genders and sexuality, and a resistance against traditional gender norms present in Callie’s relationship with the Obscure Object. For Callie, her experiences with the Obscure Object are first of all a revelation of who she truly is, and a willingness to accept this revelation:

While kissing the Object’s belly, I wasn’t just reacting to pleasurable stimuli, as I had been with Clementine. I didn’t vacate my body, as I had with Jerome. Now I was aware of what was happening. I was thinking about it. I was thinking that this was what I’d always wanted (383).

Even though their affair is not practiced or spoken about openly (at least not in the beginning), the willingness to accept herself is for Callie a brave act of defining herself against what is considered “normal.” This revelation is, however, only connected to who Callie is psychologically, and to her feelings, not her physicality. She understands that she is different, but not that this difference means that she is a boy. Callie states that “through all this [that is her sexual relationship with the

Obscure Object] I made no lasting conclusion about myself” (387). She explains further: “it’s a different thing to be inside a body than outside. From outside, you can look, inspect, compare. From inside there is no comparison” (387). For Callie, her own body is the only body she knows, and even though she slowly understands that she does not look exactly like other girls, she does not understand what this difference means. She does notice that her “crocus” is bigger than the Object’s, but, nevertheless,

The crucial feature was this: the crocus didn’t have a hole at the tip. This was certainly not what a boy had. Put yourself in my shoes, reader, and ask yourself what conclusion you would have come to about your sex, if you had what I had, if you looked the way I looked (388).

That her genitals are different from those of other girls her age does not lead her to the conclusion that she is a boy (or something in between); she has been a girl all her life, and the only way she knows herself is as a girl. As she states herself: “why should I have thought I was anything other than a girl? Because I was *attracted* to a girl? That happened all the time” (388).

Additionally, there are factors present in Callie’s and the Obscure Object’s actual lovemaking that challenge our perception of a traditional heterosexual intercourse. Cal describes how, during the act, “what went where, was secondary” (386). Even though Callie and the Object perform heterosexuality, the lack of a penis and phallic penetration would make it impossible to define their sexual act as heterosexual intercourse. Callie’s genitals, the “crocus,” become something in between female and male genitalia, and thus not strictly a penis: “the blooming of the crocus was an impersonal phenomenon. It was a kind of hook that fastened us together, more a stimulant to the Object’s outer parts than a penetration of her inner” (387).

Further, even though their relationship starts off as “wordless, blinkered, a nighttime thing, a dream thing” (385), they eventually practice it in daylight as well. Sitting in the porch swing Callie describes how “my thumb went under her cutoffs [...] I felt the fluffiness of her underpants and pressed down, sliding under the elastic. And then with our eyes wide open but confined in that way my thumb slipped inside her” (390). Both that this takes place in broad daylight and that they stare into each other’s eyes, signalize that they acknowledge what is going on between them.

Developing from “a nighttime thing” to something practiced openly suggests that Callie and the Obscure Object become more confident about themselves, and thus dare to live out their sexuality openly, consequently resisting heteronormativity.

To Remain In Between

What I consider the most important threat against heteronormativity and the present norms of gender intelligibility, however, is Cal/lie’s physicality and her choice to remain the way he/she is physically when living as male Cal. The choice of refusing genital correcting surgery is closely linked to Cal’s experience of sexual pleasure with the “crocus”: “If I sometimes thought about turning back, running back to my parents and the Clinic, and giving in, what stopped me was this private ecstasy between my legs” (453). Further, Cal’s sexual feelings are both male and female as he states how he “understood both the urgency of the man and the pleasure of the woman” (435). Consequently, both in terms of the actual physical state of his genitals, and his ambiguous experience of sexual desire, Cal remains in between as far as sexuality is concerned.

Cal/lie remains a hermaphrodite throughout the novel, and because of this he/she does indeed challenge the binary categories of male and female and what is considered as intelligible genders. Butler says about the hermaphrodite that “she/he occasions a convergence and disorganization of the rules that govern sex/gender/desire” (*Gender Trouble* 32). By inhabiting an identity that neither fits exclusively the mark of male or the mark of female, Cal/lie disrupts the fraught gender categories of male and female. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, hermaphroditism is a silenced condition, a taboo, and precisely because intersexuals are not acknowledged as belonging to a *different* category, or as transcending categorization as such, and precisely because there is no room for the existence of those falling outside the binary oppositions of male and female, we understand that hermaphroditism is indeed a threat to the stability of categories, and thus the condition needs to be silenced. As Butler argues, it is through unintelligible genders that disrupt dominant gender norms we can find resistance. Gill Jagger describes how, according to Butler, “the route to change is through repetitions that subvert dominant gender norms in the hope of destabilizing and displacing these regimes” (34), and

Cal's choice to remain in between certainly disrupts the regime upholding the existing gender norms.

Performing Gender: From Female Callie to Male Cal

“Like a convert to a new religion, I overdid it at first” (449).

Turning more directly to Judith Butler's theories, I will now focus on Eugenides's presentation of gender as performance in *Middlesex*. The clearest example of this is found when Callie, after discovering the truth about her gender/sex in Dr. Luce's office, decides to run away and live as a boy/man. As Cal travels west towards San Francisco we are witnessing him gradually learning to perform the male gender. As with Orlando, Cal's transformation from one sex into the other is very much created through superficial features, appearance, and body gestures: walking differently, cutting her/his hair, wearing a suit, speaking with a low voice, all superficial features which certainly prove that gender is just as much something you do as it is something you are. Through the discovery of his/her true gender identity, and the discovery of his/her sexuality, Callie chooses to be a man and thus he (Cal) has to perform masculinity.

To Become Male-identified

Already before leaving New York and his parents, Cal tries to establish a new gender identity. Leaving a note for Milton and Tessie stating “I am not a girl. I'm a boy,” (439) he packs his father's grey Samsonite suitcase (instead of Callie's turquoise with flowers) with “only the darker garments, a blue crew neck, the alligator shirts, and (my) corduroys,” (438) showing how Cal feels the need to create a difference between himself as male Cal and his previous female self, Callie, and that this change is best established through the superficial features of clothing. In establishing a reliable male identity, Cal's focus is on superficial features, which underlines the importance of being recognized by others to become a subject. Cal wants to be viewed, and hailed, as a boy, which in turn will make him feel like a boy himself. This point is further underlined in Cal's visit to the barber Ed. As Cal enters Ed's Barbershop the story's

point of view shifts from Cal's to that of Ed, describing Cal as "a teenage kid, tall, stringy, and an odd mix" (441). The fact that Cal's first meeting with the outside world as a boy is seen through the eyes of Ed underlines the importance of how others view you in the creation of an identity. It is also through how he is treated by others, Cal for the first time really feels that he is identified as male:

And it is right then that it happens. At some moment on Route 80 something clicks in my head and suddenly I feel I am getting the hang of it. Myron and Silvia are treating me like a son. Under this collective delusion I become that, for a little while at least. I become male-identified (450).

Through the eyes and words of others, Cal establishes himself as a male subject, but when Cal in San Francisco literally performs as the Hermaphroditus at the Sixty-Niners, exposing his true "in between-ness," he does so without letting anyone define him as unintelligible again. Cal describes how he performs so that the audience only sees him from the waist down: "all this made it much easier. I don't think I could have performed in a regular peep show, face-to-face with the voyeurs. Their gaze would have sucked my soul out of me" (484). Cal cannot experience to be recognized as unintelligible once again, and in that way lose his position as a male-identified subject, and thus he refuses to meet the gaze of the voyeurs who see him exposing his very "in between-ness".

Physical Appearance and Bodily Gestures: Performing Masculinity

Considering the role of physical appearance in establishing an identity, Callie's haircut at Ed's Barbershop is the clearest example of how physical appearance influences our perception of ourselves and our identity. It is remarkable to see how the haircut changes Cal's understanding of his own gender identity. Before the haircut, as Cal sees himself in the mirror he sees Callie, and he is thus having second thoughts: "what if that girl in the mirror really was me? How did I think I could defect to the other side so easily? What did I know about boys, about men?" (442). After the haircut, however, Cal's reaction shows how much one's physical appearance matters for one's gender identity: "I opened my eyes. And in the mirror I didn't see myself. Not the Mona Lisa with the enigmatic smile any longer. Not the shy girl with the tangled black hair in her face, but instead her fraternal twin brother" (445). By cutting

his hair, Cal feels masculine, at least on the outside: “it was unquestionably a male face, but the feelings inside that boy were still a girl’s” (445). The idea that a short haircut is masculine, and long hair is feminine, is culturally constructed, but still one of the strongest gender signifiers in existence. For Callie, her long, dark hair was such a big part of her female identity, so in order for Cal to view his gender identity as male, he also needs to let the long hair go.

It is evident through Eugenides’s portrayal of Callie’s transformation into Cal that the establishing of a new gender identity takes time. Cal describes how he “like a stroke victim, [I] was having to relearn all the simple motor skills” (441). This indicates, like Butler argues, that gender identity is created through the repetition of acts, acts that we learn to perform from an early age, and that consequently make our gender identity appear as natural. Since Cal, however, chooses to go from female to male as a teenager and because the change is made during a rather short period of time, it is easier to spot the very performativity present in Eugenides’s description of Cal’s gender transformation. For instance, Cal describes how he learns to walk like a boy through practice and repetition: “to walk like a boy you let your shoulders sway, not your hips. And you kept your feet farther apart. All this I had learned in a day and a half on the road” (441). Further, he describes how he exaggerates his masculine performance, making it more believable:

Like a convert to a new religion, I overdid it at first [...] My swagger wasn’t that different from what lots of adolescent boys put on, trying to be manly. For that reason it was convincing. Its very falseness made it credible (449).

Cal’s identity is very much created out of appearance and mimicry of what he, and society, consider typically male. Cal mimics and repeats male behavior and creates his masculinity through adapting socially and culturally constructed features of maleness, something which fits perfectly together with how Butler views gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (*Gender Trouble* 45). As a child, one is born into a specific gender category, and thus the gender performance appears more natural as it is present from the very beginning. With Cal/lie, however, his/her change from female to male as a teenager reveals an exaggerated performativity usually not visible:

The cigars, the double-breasted suits – they’re a little too much. I’m well aware of that. But I need them. They make me feel better. After what I have been through, some overcompensation is to be expected (41).

The very exaggeration of Cal’s masculinity reveals the performativity of genders, in the same way as Butler’s example with the drag artists who, through exaggeration and parody, show that in fact “all” genders are performances, and that there is no such thing as true or false when it comes to gender.

Challenging the Stability of Gender Categories

How easily Cal adapts to a new gender identity challenges the notion of gender identity as something stable, consisting of either a male or a female core. In becoming Cal, Callie does not change anything about her inner self; the transformation into Cal is exclusively physical, and Cal describes at several occasions how traces of his female identity are still present in him when living as a male:

Now and then I fell out of character. Feeling something stuck to the bottom of my shoe, I kicked up my heel and looked back over my shoulder to see what it was, rather than crossing my leg in front of me and twisting up my shoe (449).

In keeping his female self very much intact, Cal is challenging the binary oppositions of gender identity. Cal, narrating as a grown man, describes: “I never felt out of place being a girl. I still don't feel entirely at home among men” (479). In fact, for Cal the transformation from female to male does not seem to create that big changes in his life as he states “it's amazing what you can get used to” (520). The only thing that *has* changed is that Cal considers himself as male rather than female, his personality and selfhood are still the same.

In her essay “Narrating Identity in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*,” Elizabeth Piastra claims that “when Callie becomes Cal, the actual physical body remains unchanged; it is Cal’s understanding and interpretation of the facticity of his body that is different,” (16) which I think explains well how it is not our bodies that determine our gender, but what we *do* with our bodies. It is evident that for Eugenides (and Cal), gender does not determine *you*, it is rather you who determine your gender and you do so through performance. This view of gender identity is in accordance with how Butler views gender as something inhabiting the body, not something deciding over it.

For Cal there is, however, a bodily urge present in his decision to become male, namely his sexual drive. Although this desire becomes a determining factor in Cal/lie's gender transformation, the transformation itself reveals gender as socially and culturally constructed.

The points explored in the above paragraphs illustrate one of the features I find most interesting in the character of Cal/lie, namely his decision to go from girl to man, still not repressing his feminine identity fully. This is also what I would argue makes Cal/lie challenge the traditional division of gender into the binary oppositions of male and female. Cal describes in retrospect how he has always felt like he belonged to and spoke the language of *both* genders: "already latent inside me, like the future 120 mph serve of a tennis prodigy, was the ability to communicate between the genders, to see not with the monovision of one sex but in the stereoscopes of both" (269). This quote touches upon the advantages of being in between, which can be similar to how Virginia Woolf sees the ideal status of androgyny as presented in chapter two. In *Middlesex*, Zora, the intersexual Cal stays with in San Francisco, represents this view of hermaphrodites and intersexuals as the *real* and original human beings. Through Zora, Cal gets introduced to intersexuals as a group, and as an available category of identification. Zora, looking like a "normal" woman, still wants to identify herself as a hermaphrodite, because, she says, "we're what's next" (490). Cal, on the other hand, does not feel comfortable defining himself as a hermaphrodite, or joining any intersexual community. He just wants to be acknowledged as a human being: "we hermaphrodites are people like everybody else. And I happen not to be a political person. I don't like groups" (106).

Again, Cal/lie is resisting categorization, which I will argue is a general theme in *Middlesex*. I think the point Eugenides wants to prove is that to define Cal as an intersexual is just as restricting as defining him as male or female. Elizabeth Piastra describes how "Cal's problem with Zora's activism is that it does not acknowledge difference such as that which existed between Cal and Zora themselves" (28). In short, Cal refuses collective identification because within every category of identification there will exist difference. Through this refusal Cal proposes a valuable critique of the fraught identity categories and society's need to put a label on every individual, and every individual's need to be recognized as what is considered as "normal" by society. Cal, however, has discovered the very contradictory nature of

normality: “but I was beginning to understand something about normality. Normality wasn’t normal. It couldn’t be. If normality were normal, everybody could leave it alone. They could sit back and let normality manifest itself” (446).

Concluding Remarks

“In most ways I remained the person I’d always been” (520).

At the end of *Middlesex* Cal/lie has become Cal, and our teenage girl protagonist has been turned into a teenage boy and, telling the story, a grown-up man. Precisely because Cal ends up as Cal, a male heterosexual, it is tempting to dismiss *Middlesex* as a novel that fails in its attempt to present otherness; someone in between, and that fails in its attempt to challenge heteronormativity. One can argue, like Deborah Shostak does in her essay “Theory Uncompromised by Practicality: Hybridity in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*,” that Cal has no other choice than to become male if he wants to be constituted as an intelligible subject. Shostak states that Cal’s “choice is effectively no choice at all” (405). For Shostak, Cal/lie’s choice to become Cal proves that there exists no space available for definition between male and female, and thus “*Middlesex* exposes impasses in the politics of gendered and cultural identity that, in turn, highlight the distance between theory and practice” (Shostak 387). I would argue, however, that Eugenides tries to minimize this gap between theory and practice. Even though Cal *does* end up as a male heterosexual, I hope that I have proved throughout this chapter that Cal/lie in many ways remains in between even at the novel’s very end. I have shown how his/her physicality, the refusal to undergo genital surgery, sexuality, and personality challenge the idea of gender as exclusively based on the binary oppositions of male and female, and in that way I hope I have presented how Eugenides opens up for a broader understanding and acceptance for those falling outside the existing gender categories. Further, Cal’s insistence that he “in most ways remained the person I’d always been,” indicates that his change of gender is more of a superficial and physical character, not something that alters his personality, which again proves that gender identity is not something absolute. The process of turning female Callie into male Cal reveals gender as a social and

culturally learned process; a performance of acts that through time have disguised as absolute and natural features of the body.

I have in previous paragraphs touched upon the painful existence of being in between that Cal/lie experiences in the novel, and how he/she does not want to define him/herself as a member of any category, whether it is male, female, or intersexual. Eugenides's proposal is not like Fausto-Sterling's, to introduce new categories for gender identification,³ rather he seems to want to get away from fraught categories as identity determiners. Even though Cal/lie chooses to live as Cal, and thus to define himself as male, he explains that he "never felt out of place being a girl. I still don't feel entirely at home among men" (479). Through this criticism of categorization that is found throughout *Middlesex*, Eugenides takes on a Butlerian understanding of identity, and the construction of gender. Butler's aim is after all to "show that identity categories are fictional products of these regimes of power/knowledge or power/discourse rather than natural effects of the body" (Jagger 17). Cal's resistance lies precisely in his ability to transcend gender categories and norms, and to define himself as something other, both to himself and eventually to those around him. In *Middlesex*'s very first sentence, Cal states that he was born twice: "first, as a baby girl, on a remarkable smogless Detroit day in January of 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974" (3). Following this he also describes a third birth: "but now, at the age of forty-one, I feel another birth coming on," (3) which I see as his final acceptance of himself, and his identity. This final birth incorporates both his birth as a baby girl and his birth as a teenage boy, and thus it signalizes a unification and an acceptance of his identity, or rather *identities*.

Finally, by letting *Middlesex*'s protagonist end up as a male heterosexual, Eugenides suggests that to be in between is, if not impossible, still not coming without pain, and that we have a long way to go in achieving full acceptance for every individual, no matter gender or sexuality. I will argue, however, that because Eugenides succeeds in presenting such a truthful portrait of someone in between the gender categories of male and female, *Middlesex* does indeed create hope that

³ In *Sexing the Body*, Fausto-Sterling refers to a proposal suggesting that we replace our two-sex system with a five-sex one. In addition the male and female, the categories of herms (named after "true" hermaphrodites), merms (named after male "pseudo-hermaphrodites"), and fermes (named after female "pseudo-hermaphrodites") should be accepted (*Sexing the Body* 78).

someday we will fulfill Butler's wish for "success in increasing the possibilities for a livable life for those who live, or try to live on the sexual margins" (*Gender Trouble* xxviii).

Conclusion

Judith Butler's proposal for a new "feminist genealogy," a new way of looking at gender and the construction of gender categories were my basis for investigating the representation of gender in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex*. Through using Butler's theories as a starting point, I have explored in how the two novels challenge a traditional representation of gender, and how they provide us with new perspectives on the concept of gender and gender categories. Butler's ideas, especially her theory of gender as performance, her deconstructonistic view on categories as limited and restrictive, and her proposal for resisting categorization from within, have helped me when exploring the concept of gender. Through my reading of *Orlando* and *Middlesex* in the light of Butler's ideas, I have investigated in which ways the two novels promote a "Butlerian" understanding of gender, and I think it is evident throughout this thesis that both novels challenge the traditional concept of gender, but there are not only similarities, but also differences in how the novels represent gender, and consequently they are considered as challenging in different ways.

First of all, the idea of gender as performance is evident in both novels as both Orlando and Cal/lie undergo a gender transformation largely presented through superficial elements: clothing, appearance, and bodily gestures. In *Orlando*, performativity in the literal sense of the word is present through Woolf's frequent play with clothing and cross-dressing. This exaggerated performance creates a parodic effect that to some extent ridicules the stereotypical gender conventions of Woolf's time. Far more than *Middlesex*, *Orlando* contains an implicit feminist voice demanding equality between the genders, and challenging the expected roles of male and female in society. These issues were much more relevant in Woolf's day and age than when *Middlesex* was published over seventy years later, and by investigating some perspectives presented in Woolf's "theoretical" work *A Room of One's Own*, I have shown how Woolf's feminist ideas are discussed in her fictional text as well, although she herself said that "it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex" (*A Room of One's Own* 102).

Precisely because of the two novels' different background, their representation of gender is necessarily different, and thus must be considered in relation to the political, social and cultural discourse in which the novels were produced. That being said, *Orlando* presents a very modern view on gender that, as we have seen throughout this thesis, easily can be linked to Butler's ideas about gender presented decades later. *Orlando* contains an implicit criticism of the constructed gender roles and conventions of male and female, and questions who it is that constructs these conventions, and why this and that are considered typical for each gender. *Middlesex* on the other hand, presents a critique of the idea of gender categories as such. The very existence of intersexuals, such as Cal/lie, seems to be an argument that gender should not be defined after the binary oppositions of male and female, and further that Cal/lie refuses to identify him/herself as exclusively male or exclusively female underlines this argument. Consequently, I will argue that *Orlando* questions the constructed categories of male and female, whereas *Middlesex* questions categorization as an overall concept. In Woolf's novel there is present an implicit critique of the conservative forces in the society of which Woolf herself was a part, forces that upheld the rigid gender norms and decided what was considered proper for each gender. *Middlesex*, however, is critical to the postmodern American society that pretends to offer total freedom for the individual, when in reality one is surrounded with different norms regarding how to be an "intelligible human being."

Like *Orlando*, the performance aspect of gender in *Middlesex* is also revealed by showing how a gender identity is produced largely through adapting culturally constructed features of that specific gender one seeks to inhabit. Cal's male gender identity is attained by the change of clothes, a haircut, and a different way of walking, and ultimately, by being recognized as a male by other people. In both novels, the gender transformation is followed by an insistence that nothing has changed, *except* their gender, and thus both Woolf and Eugenides suggest that gender is not something absolute, is more of a process; gradually manifesting itself through acts, it is, as Butler argues, a performance.

The idea that gender is not something absolute is not only connected to the performance aspect of gender, but also to a larger, overall critique of categorical thinking present in Butler's works, and in both *Orlando* and, especially, *Middlesex*. Butler's critique of the present status of feminist criticism builds precisely on the

obsession with defining women as a single category, because, as she explains in the preface to *Gender Trouble*, “any feminist theory that restricts the meaning of gender in the presuppositions of its own practice sets up exclusionary gender norms within feminism” (viii). For Butler, the aim is to break down and transcend this categorization, and consequently open up for new possibilities of existence. Fraught identity categories, such as male and female, will necessarily lead to several individuals falling outside or in between these categories, such as Cal/lie in *Middlesex*. Eugenides’s portrayal of Cal/lie shows how painful the position in between can be, in fact, it is so painful that Cal/lie chooses to live as male, heterosexual Cal. I have sought to prove, however, that despite ending up as male Cal, *Middlesex* remains controversial in its portrayal of gender. As I have pointed out before, Cal’s unchanged physicality, and his claim of not feeling entirely male or female, clearly make his gender identity challenging. Eugenides’s aim with the novel seems to be similar to Butler’s hope, namely to gain recognition for all human beings, no matter of what gender and/or sexuality.

The wish for recognition and increased freedom for each gender is also present in *Orlando*. Woolf’s background from the Bloomsbury group and her close relationship with the exceptionally colorful Vita Sackville-West certainly influenced her radical ideas of gender and gender roles. Woolf must have been familiar with Sackville-West’s experiences with cross-dressing, and the freedom it gave her, as we in *Orlando* see several examples of Woolf presenting clothing as a possibility for transcending gender categories. Woolf uses clothing and costumes as a humorous effect causing confusion, for instance with the character of Archduchess Harriet who turns out to be Archduke Harry, but through this playfulness there is also a wish to disrupt and challenge our stereotypical and traditional understanding of gender.

Both novels also deal with the difficulties of representation, both in terms of representing oneself, as Cal does, and in terms of representing someone else, as the narrator does in *Orlando*. As I have explored in chapter three, Cal’s story becomes in many ways his manner of defining himself as a subject, and his way of creating a language in which there is room for someone like him, as opposed to the language that defines him as unintelligible, or rather not at all. Consequently, in *Middlesex*, narration and language become ways to challenge the traditional concept of gender, as it is precisely through Cal’s narration that we are presented to this complex individual

that he/she is. In *Orlando*, however, Woolf seems to be critical towards language's ability to represent an individual, or rather to represent an individual through someone else's language. Woolf sees the individual as complex, something that cannot be reduced to a single subject of representation, or to a single category of identification, and in that way she positions herself together with Eugenides and Butler in their critique of fraught identity categories and the limitations these categories put upon human beings.

As I have already mentioned, the clearest difference between Orlando and Cal/lie is found in how they position themselves in relation to the gender categories of male and female. Orlando experiences a sudden transformation from one gender to the other, but even when being biologically male and biologically female he/she switches gender roles both through appearance and behavior. Cal/lie, on the other hand, is positioned in between the two categories, and even though he/she lives as either female or male, this "in between-ness" is always present. Orlando's gender transformation is only possible in a fictional universe, whereas Cal/lie's condition can very well exist among us. These differences can again be explained by the novels' contemporaries, and the political and social discourses in which they were produced. Woolf's "truthful but fantastic" novel needed to be fantastic in order to be accepted. To play with the concept of gender at Woolf's time was probably more easily accepted if it was done in a merely fictional universe, whereas Eugenides's contemporaries were arguably more liberal and open-minded concerning gender. The condition of hermaphroditism is, however, at present still tabooed, and thus *Middlesex* represents an individual with a gender identity considered controversial even today.

Eugenides's novel is also taking into consideration an issue not much debated at Woolf's time, namely whether nature or nurture are determining for an individual's gender identity. Related to this, the aspect of sexuality and sexual desire is explored in much more depth in *Middlesex* than in *Orlando*. For Cal/lie there *is* something that is basic in his/her gender identity, and that is his/her sexual attraction to women, and it is this desire that makes Cal/lie "cross over to the other side." Even though Callie's choice to become Cal is based on her basic sexual desire, the very process of becoming male, and the presence of female Callie in Cal certainly prove that gender is fluid, ever-changing, and not absolute, despite the existence of a natural sexual drive.

Finally, working with the ideas of Judith Butler and her theoretical influences has been challenging, as both her own ideas and the ideas by which she has been inspired are so manifold and diverse. It is hard to put a label on “the theoretician” Butler, as her works cover fields such as queer theory, feminist theory, “race” studies, film studies, literary studies, sociology, politics, and philosophy (Salih 13), and consequently, as Sara Salih states, Butler “has had an enormous impact in numerous fields” (2). Precisely because Butler’s influences and her background are so diverse, her proposal for a “new feminist genealogy” has a broad appeal, and not just theoretically, but also at a general human level. Her wish is after all to make life a little more worth living for *all* individuals. Sarah Salih describes how Butler,

Calls for nothing less than the transformation of the social world as it is currently constituted, since it is a place in which responses to the question “What is human?” come far too easily, and where defining difference invariably entails the violence of exclusion (1).

Of course, to call for the “transformation of the social world as it is currently constituted” is not a modest proposal, but it is, however, a very important one. The idea that one has to be a certain way, both in terms of for instance gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, in order to be defined as an intelligible human being, produces a society where many are considered normal, but where opposed to these, we will find the “not-normal” - the intelligible versus the unintelligible. Butler’s deconstructionist approach, however, seeks to pick apart these categories, and reveal their true status, as culturally and socially constructed rather than absolute truths. Through a break down of these binary oppositions, such as normal versus “not-normal,” male versus female, there is hope for broader acceptance, and for a society where the question “What is human?” is answered with “everyone,” no matter of which gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or political views.

Precisely because Butler’s theories have attracted such a broad audience, an enormous amount of work related to her ideas have been produced in many fields. Despite this, I hope that my approach presents some interesting viewpoints, both related to Butler and the two novels analyzed. Still, considering the richness of both *Orlando* and *Middlesex*, and Butler’s many published books and essays, there will be several undiscovered ideas related to the representation of gender in the two novels. Limitations both in time and space have made me obliged to focus on what *I* find

most relevant and interesting for my investigation, but that does not mean that whatever can be said on this particular topic has been said.

In the end, I hope that, by applying Butler's theories to such different novels, I have succeeded in presenting new perspectives on both *Orlando's* and *Middlesex's* representation of gender, and perhaps also new ways of seeing Butler's ideas. Through identifying how the novels represent gender in accordance with Butler's views, I have shown how literature can introduce us to new ideas, broaden our horizon, and perhaps also challenge our existing understanding of particular topics, such as gender.

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