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Verita Sriratana

Department of English, Faculty of Arts,
Chulalongkorn University
Verita.S@chula.ac.th

"A Most Bewildering and Whirligig State of Mind": Alternative Utopian Space in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*

Abstract. From its birth in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) to the present day, thinkers tend to regard utopia as either *eutopia* ("good place"), a blueprint of an ideal state which exists or can be made to exist, a critique of contemporary society, or *utopos* ("no place"), a mere escapist's fantasy. These opposing views converged when utopia was revived as a trend of sociological thought in the early to mid-twentieth century. Karl Mannheim in the 1920s and Ernst Bloch in the 1960s share the idea that whether utopia is a dream or a reality might not be so important an issue as its being a sure sign of human ability to dream and hope for a better place. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), with its defamiliarisation technique and its aim to put readers in "a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind" of a manly woman/womanly man character living through five centuries as an English male aristocrat striding in a country estate to a female gypsy wandering in a desert, proposes a groundbreaking mental utopia which embraces the mentality of men and women across time, the positions of all social castes and classes, the bustling city and the calm countryside. *Orlando* not only marries the "granite-like" *eutopia* with the "rainbow-like" *utopos* but also questions the existing social norms and order.

Keywords: Utopia; Modernism; space; time; Virginia Woolf; *Orlando*; Vita Sackville-West; Ernst Bloch; Karl Mannheim; defamiliarisation.

1. Introduction: "Good Place" and "No Place"

Whether Sir Thomas More's Utopia, an island in the shape of a crescent moon, a perfected welfare society, was meant as a satire on the England and Europe of his time or a serious blueprint of an ideal state, or both, is unclear. What has become clear or made clear by thinkers through the ages, however, is that utopia is a complex concept often hijacked to serve different ends. The word "utopia" itself yields ambiguous opposing meanings. The binary oppositions can be seen repeated in almost every attempt to define it. According to the *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, for example, "utopia" is derived "[f]rom the Greek words *utopos* ('no place') and *eutopia* ('good place')." Though the narrator of *Utopia* stresses that the book depicts the latter, a good and felicitous place where poverty is completely eradicated, some outrageous parts of the account, such as the proposition that the mentally ill in society should be regarded only as a source of amusement and that the citizens of Utopia can never have the freedom to leave the island, suggest otherwise. Perhaps, as More's utopian prototype suggests, there is always a high price to pay in order to attain and maintain the "eulogic" side of eutopia. Perhaps, by displaying the shocking extremity of conflicting values, utopia might stimulate readers and citizens of the existing society to strive for a fine balance. The ideal society driven by a communalist and, at the same time, capitalist agenda might never materialise at all. The "good place" is, perhaps, "nowhere" to be found. Darko Suvin, much later in the 1970s, asserts that utopia is "a space and a state (itself ambiguously hovering between, e.g. French *état* and *condition*) that are non-existing (*ou*) as well as good (*eu*)" (1973: 121).

Around 50 years before Suvin reached his conclusive definition, the "ambiguously hovering" tension between eutopia, the good place, and *utopos*, the no place, was foreshadowed by Karl Mannheim's description of the "utopian mentality":

> A state of mind is utopian when it is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs […]. Only those orientations transcending reality will be referred to by us as utopian which, when they pass over to conduct, tend to shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at the time. (Mannheim 1936: 173)

Utopia is not only a physical place but also a state of mind. By presenting a physical or mental space which has good and bad elements in the extreme,

utopia moves readers into questioning the contemporary society and all its norms and values.

Louis Wirth, in his preface to Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, not only reaffirms Mannheim's statement but also highlights its universality. Turning to foreign lexis and culture to illustrate this idea, he points out that Utopia is:

> [W]hat the Japanese call *kikenshiso* or "dangerous thoughts." The Authorities regard discussion of democracy, constitutionalism, the emperor, socialism, and a host of other subjects as dangerous because knowledge on these topics might subvert the sanctioned beliefs and undermine the existing order. (Wirth 1936: xvi–xvii)

Utopian mentality is not only cross-cultural but also cross-temporal. The prevailing images of blissful heaven and woeful hell tend to shape and, in some cases, govern an individual's moral sense. Cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead contends that it is the fearful picture of hell, not heaven, which has the stronger grip on human hearts and minds: "Heaven and all the pallid utopias are, in fact, even like Nirvana, blank white spaces—or spaces a little tinted with pastel and furnished with plastic gadgets—and are given reality only by contrast with the fear, pain, and agony of some other state" (1957: 958). Likewise, what makes the images of utopia, the "good place" which is also the "no place," so powerfully gripping is the gruesome reality of the present as well as the fear and threat of the unknown future.

The ability to imagine "kikenshiso" or think dangerously "outside" and beyond rigid social structure while having futuristic paradise in view and remaining "inside" contemporary social norms and structure is important. This means that utopia sketches the future with materials of the past and the present. Utopia, explains Peter Ruppert, has a strong tendency to

> testify to our inability simply to dream our way out of our historical situation. Implicit in all utopian dreams is the urge to escape, the desire to get away from an awareness of time and change. Hence, those ever-present boundaries that enclose all utopian landscape. (1986: 3)

Moreover, as Ernst Bloch propounds in *The Principle of Hope*, whether utopia is more a fantasy or a reality might not be so important an issue as its being a sign of human's ability to dream and hope for a better place:

> Everybody's life is pervaded by daydreams: one part of this is just stale, even enervating escapism, even booty for swindlers, but

> another part is provocative, is not content just to accept the bad which exists, does not accept annunciation. This other part has hoping at its core, and is teachable. (1985: 3)

Utopia is, therefore, not an escapist's daydream. It is also not a dull manifesto. It is, rather, a synthesis of dreams and reality, the abstract and the concrete. It shows human's imaginative power to paint a strange picture of the far away and the long ago, the strange and the fantastic, in order to look at society with fresh eyes and perspective. In short, it embraces both the "good place" and the "no place," as well as examining the tensions caused by such an unlikely union. The revival of the "utopian craze" among scholars and readers in the twentieth century has thus added depth and new dimensions to the study of utopia and also to the ways in which literature can be read. This essay will explore *Orlando*, a novel written at the beginning of the twentieth century, in this new utopian light.

2. *Orlando*: An Alternative Utopia

In her diary entry dated Saturday 22 October 1927, Virginia Woolf mentioned her new project at hand: "I am writing Orlando half in a mock style very clear & plain, so that people will understand every word. But the balance between truth & fantasy must be careful" (Bell 1982: 162). Had *Orlando* been meant to be a utopian text at the start, such an endeavour to find a fine balance between satire and serious statement might rightfully be regarded as identical to the striving for a union between the truthful *eutopia* and the fantastical *utopos*. However, in reality, *Orlando* was meant to serve a much more modest and particular aim. It was meant to be a fun and delightful spoof biography of Vita Sackville-West: "And instantly the usual exciting devices enter my mind: a biography beginning in the year 1500 & continuing to the present day, called Orlando: Vita; only with a change about from one sex to another" (Bell 1982: 161).

This essay propounds that what makes this personal *roman á clef*, this playful biography, universally appealing is its ability to transcend not only its author's initial agenda but also the reader's expectations. An amalgamation of truth and fantasy, of the "granite-like" physical space and the "rainbow-like" mental space[1], the book offers more than a refreshingly alternative view

[1] In her essay "The New Biography," which first appeared in October 1927, Virginia Woolf asserts that most biographical writings have managed to capture only the dull "granite"

on contemporary social values. This essay proposes that *Orlando* can be read as a ground-breaking alternative utopian literature because: firstly, it is a conscious "truthful fantasy," a product of the defamiliarisation technique, the opposite of traditional utopian literature which tends to deny any escapist motive. The world of the past and the present made "strange" and "shocking" serves as a comparison to the contemporary world and, hence, drives readers into questioning the existing social norms. Secondly, it illustrates the "technology of place," displaying the union as well as tension between the concrete physical place and the abstract mental place, between the "good place" and the "no place." The unification of dualistic extremes leads to the questioning of the fixity of place and of human identity. Lastly, it offers a revolutionary all-embracing alternative utopian space or outlook which oscillates between the masculine and the feminine, between the dominant and the dominated class, between the urban and the rural sentiment.

3. *Orlando*: "Truthful; but Fantastic"

> Vita should be Orlando, a young nobleman. There should be Lytton. & it should be truthful; but fantastic. (Bell 1982: 156)

When Orlando asks: "What's an 'age', indeed? What are 'we'?" (Woolf 1998: 196), she has already been transformed into a woman living in the eighteenth century. Looking back to the past when she had been first an Elizabethan nobleman living at Knole and then a seventeenth-century

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aspects of life, the hard and concrete "outer life of work and activity" (1967: 230) such as how many university degrees one had obtained, how many professional positions one had been promoted to. The "rainbow" aspects of life, the fluid and imagined "inner life of emotion and thought" (1967: 230), are often neglected:

> On the one hand there is truth; on the other there is personality. And if we think of truth as something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility and reflect that the aim of biography is to weld these two into one seamless whole, we shall admit that the problem is a stiff one and that we need not wonder if biographers have for the most part failed to solve it. (1967: 229)

Woolf proposes that the "queer amalgamation of dream and reality" and "perpetual marriage of granite and rainbow" (1967: 235) will lead to a more refreshingly creative kind of biography.

ambassador to Constantinople, Orlando articulates the very subject which has fascinated human beings through the ages: the quest for the meaning of history and identity. A historical age can be regarded as a temporal space, a slot in time endowed with meanings which can only be given and assessed retrospectively. It reflects what we think of ourselves. Hence, what an age is to us will tell us what we are, have been, and will be. The present will always be impossible for us to sum up because we have not moved out of that particular temporal space. It is only through recollection of the past and speculation about the future that we find solace in our existing "self" and situation: "For what more terrifying revelation can there be than that it is the present moment? That we survive the shock at all is only possible because the past shelters us on one side and the future on another" (Woolf 1998: 285). Traditional utopian literature tends to map out, in meticulous detail, an exotic land of the long ago and the faraway which contains elements of the past and the present, of the real and the surreal. *Orlando*, on the contrary, offers terrain of unabashed fantasy. However, the book depicts not a whimsical dream world. It attempts, on the contrary, to expose and criticise how we make sense of moments in history and how we perceive ourselves. This it does by means of defamiliarisation[2].

To unveil the makings of a certain temporal space called an "age," along with its norms or the "spirit of the age," *Orlando* defamiliarises both mental and material aspects of a particular era. In its description of the eighteenth-century new trend of social parties and intellectual salons, society is viewed and redefined in a fresh light:

> [S]ociety is one of those brews such as skilled housekeepers serve hot about Christmas time, whose flavour depends upon the proper mixing and stirring of a dozen different ingredients. Take one out, and it is in itself insipid [...]. At one and the same time, therefore, society is everything and society is nothing. Society is the most powerful concoction in the world and society has no existence whatsoever. (Woolf 1998: 185)

By making strange the very definition of "society," *Orlando* brings to attention the tension between the binary oppositions "everything" and "nothing" which shatter our received notions of society. Not only does

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[2] According to the *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, the term "defamiliarisation" is a translation of the Russian *ostranenie* which means "making strange." The concept was introduced by Russian formalist thinker Viktor Shklovsky (Cuddon 1999: 213–14).

it paint a long ago land, that of the eighteenth century, as much utopian literature does; *Orlando* offers a "fresh eye," an alternative lens through which we are able to radically question and challenge the values of the past and the existing society. This is a new kind of utopia, one which does exactly what Ruppert, in *Reader in a Strange Land: The Activity of Reading Literary Utopias*, proposes it should do: "utopias should be grasped as works of the imagination, as symbolic constructs, which function not to represent islands of social perfection but to serve as thought-provoking catalysts whose value is in their shock effect on readers" (1986: xiii).

A historical age, like a foreign country, is represented here in forms of tangible materials. Whereas traditional utopian literature normally conjures up images of a foreign city or an alien world, *Orlando* magically transforms the images and objects of mundane life into foreign yet familiar artifacts. Here, the stuffy corseted nineteenth century is described in terms of clothes, food, and pieces of furniture:

> The muffin was invented and the crumpet. Coffee supplanted the after-dinner port, and, as coffee led to a drawing-room in which to drink it, and a drawing-room to glass cases, and glass cases to artificial flowers, and artificial flowers to mantelpieces, and mantelpieces to pianofortes, and pianofortes to drawing-room ballads, and drawing-room ballads (skipping a stage or two) to innumerable little dogs, mats, and china ornaments, the home—which had become extremely important—was completely altered. (Woolf 1998: 218)

The notion that one is allocated a space in time and that one is deeply rooted in the social norms and values of a particular period is questioned and challenged by none other than Orlando herself. Though Orlando finds the Victorian "spirit of the age" unnatural to her, she slowly adopts the predominant custom of the age and immerses herself in the tide of history:

> [E]ach man and each woman has another allotted to it for life, whom it supports, by whom it is supported, till death do them part […]. Thus did the spirit work upon her, for all her past pride, and as she came sloping down the scale of emotion to this lowly and unaccustomed lodging place, those twanglings and tinglings which had been so captious and so interrogative modulated into the sweetest melodies, till it seemed as if angels were plucking harp-strings with white fingers and her whole being was pervaded by a seraphic harmony. (Woolf 1998: 234)

The unremitting call for extreme adulation of matrimony and family values ceases to be a forlorn cry which threatens to shatter Orlando's Elizabethan aristocrat and oriental ambassador self. On the contrary, it becomes identified with the heavenly voice of angels leading social members onto the holy path of conformity. How the spirit of the age finally has its way with Orlando culminates in her willingness to adopt the invention of the age: the exalted wedding band. Here, by taking in the object prevalent the Victorian period, Orlando embraces the doctrine which comes with it: "it was by the gleam on her wedding ring that she would be assigned her station among the angels and its luster would be tarnished for ever if she let it out of her keeping for a second" (1998: 230)**.** Blurring the borderlines which separate the past from the present, fact from fantasy, *Orlando* places emphasis on the idea that there is no such thing as a truthful portrayal of a historical age. The past is a product of constant re-evaluations from the perspective and imagination of the present. It can only be grasped and represented as an image which is truthful and, at the same time, fantastic.

4. *Orlando*: "Can One Really be in Love with a House?"

> Can one really be in love with a house? Is there not something sterile, so that one's mind becomes stringy in these passions? [...]. I think this is true. (Bell 1982: 191)

In her diary entry dated Monday 4 July 1927, Virginia Woolf's scathing remarks on Vita Sackville-West's literary oeuvre reveal an interesting connection between style of writing and style of furnishing a house:

> As for her [Vita's] poetry, or intelligence, save when canalised in the traditional channels, I can say nothing very certain. She never breaks fresh ground. She picks up what the tide rolls to her feet. For example, she follows with simple instinct, all the inherited tradition of furnishing, so that her house is gracious, glowing, stately, but without novelty or adventure. So with her poetry, I daresay. (Bell 1982: 146)

The vivid link between mental and physical aspects of place described in this personal sketch is a clear illustration of the concept "technology of place"[3] I wish to use as theoretical framework in this essay. "Technology

[3] I have offered a more comprehensive explanation on my concept of "technology of place" in *"Unleashing the Underdog": Technology of Place and Virginia Woolf's* Flush.

of place" is an analytical device or "technology" through which we construct and deconstruct the fixity of place. It shows that place is not a fixed concept or an empty representation. It is a combination of both. Place in our understanding is a product of constant negotiations between and amalgamations of "concrete place," a particular place's physical structure and texture perceived through the senses, and "abstract place," a particular place's ideas, memories, and representations. The union and tension between the tangible and the intangible challenges the fixity of place and questions our received notions on social values and structures which are cemented by spatial construction.

The hegemony behind spatial discourse is exposed through the technology of place. Here, the young man Orlando, descended from a long line of English noblemen, visits his family crypt at Knole and contemplates how his family history has been made tangible through the house structure: "It was a ghastly sepulcher; dug deep beneath the foundations of the house as if the first Lord of the family, who had come from France with the Conqueror, had wished to testify how all pomp is built upon corruption" (Woolf 1998: 68). A house is traditionally believed to be a status symbol. By juxtaposing the glory of family history with the location of the vault which is beneath the superficial display of the family house, this passage questions the concept of nobility. Reading through the surface of concrete place, readers can get the sense that this elegant aristocratic household was built on wars, death, and decay.

Even when the physicality of place seems to have succumbed to time, the technology of place, how we compare and contrast "concrete place" with "abstract place," remains intact. A clear example can be seen when, in the "present day" of 1928, Orlando's house becomes "museumised," made accessible to the public to commemorate the glory of foregone age and the passage of history: "The house was no longer hers entirely, she sighed. It belonged to time now; to history; was past the touch and control of the living" (1998: 304). Though her house has been transformed from a "home," a permanent place of residence, into a tourist attraction "past the touch and control of the living," Orlando's perception of her house is still a fresh product of an amalgamation of and juxtaposition between the memories of the "home" she spends her life in and the concrete edifice which contains objects of the past encaged behind rope fences. It is the tangible reality of the present change that drives her into the nostalgic mental homecoming act of harking back to the past when the house was free from rope fences and historical timeline boards as well as labels, when the house was actually lived in, the chairs sat on and carpets soiled or burned by visitors such as the poet Nicholas Greene. Technology of place not only

demonstrates that the concrete and abstract merge but also brings to attention how they are, in fact, fluid and interchangeable. Any action undertaken in the present, for example, spilling beer or burning holes in the carpet will, in a flash of an instant, be captured and recorded in the memory of the person performing the deed and the onlooker. The visible marks on the carpet draw out and fuse with the intangible marks on the mind, and *vice versa*. This contributes to the makings of place in our understanding.

Apart from being a creative insight into how the physical and the mental, the "concrete place" and the "abstract place," clash and converge, *Orlando* can also be read as an attempt to restore to its most passionate owner the house which Vita Sackville-West was prohibited from inheriting and inhabiting because of her sex. In recreating and restoring Vita's childhood home, Virginia Woolf not only paints a faithful picture of Knole but also, through her imaginative prowess, forges a strong and unbreakable bond between the house and Vita's blood ties. Knole, along with each and every blade of grass and the animals which subsist on them, has long been part of the Sackvilles. As Vita is a member of the Sackville family, the house will always be a part of Vita's life and identity. It is, therefore, not surprising that such a consoling statement touches the heart of the biography's subject herself. "You made me cry with your passages about Knole, you wretch" (Sackville-West 1985: 306), wrote the emotional Vita in her letter to Virginia Woolf on 11 October 1928, right after having read the novel. Memorialised and immortalised in *Orlando*, the Knole of Vita's real childhood home and family heritage is transformed into the Knole of universal loss and injustice which every reader, every dispossessed and marginalised person, might be able to share and recognise. Knole as a concrete place has ceased to be a mere English nobleman's house. It becomes, in the process, an abstract terrain of loss and longing.

5. Orlando: "A Most Bewildering and Whirligig State of Mind"

> She was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each. It was a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind to be in. (Woolf 1998: 152)

Orlando not only restores physical place – Knole with its concrete stones, walls, 365 rooms, and furniture, to its "rightful" owner. It not only offers an alternative Knole, a timeless and universal space which appeals to the feelings and imagination of the mass. Most importantly, however,

the novel also restores and offers a utopian mental space where the concrete and abstract, reality and fantasy, meet and merge. Orlando, as a woman returning to England from the Orient, comments on her mental terrain which records the changes brought about by the passage of time and the technology of place in the making:

> 'What a phantasmagoria the mind is and meeting-place of dissemblables. At one moment we deplore our birth and state and aspire to an ascetic exaltation; the next we are overcome by the smell of some old garden path and weep to hear the thrushes sing.' (Woolf 1998: 169)

An all-embracing mind which traverses and questions the boundaries of gender, class, space, and time is an alternative space contrary to most utopias depicted in traditional utopian literature. Instead of being molded out of fear and torture, this alternative "utopian vision" or "utopian mentality" in *Orlando* is "a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind to be in" (Woolf 1998: 152) molded out of humour and fantasy, reality made strange to our received notions about ourselves and our society. Orlando's mind and body, in particular, are alternative spaces which transcend the rigid classification and compartmentalisation of gender. Orlando's overnight sex change, an issue which lies far beyond the grasp of any logical explanation, is delayed by the mythical figures symbolising all the social norms and prejudice as opposed to truth: Our Lady of Purity, Our Lady of Chastity, Our Lady of Modesty. Here, the three muses of "untruth" and conventionality have to leave the chamber where the mysterious and slumbering Orlando reclines and, instead, seek others of conventional profession and nature:

> 'For there, not here (all [*Our Lady of Purity/Chastity/Modesty*] speak together joining hands and making gestures of farewell and despair towards the bed where Orlando lies sleeping) dwell still in nest and boudoir, office and lawcourt those who love us; those who honour us, virgins and citymen; lawyers and doctors; those who prohibit; those who deny; those who reverence without knowing why; …To them we go, you we leave. Come, Sisters, come! This is no place for us here.' (Woolf 1998: 131–32)

What is happening in Orlando's bedchamber is against everything that society, with its strict allocation of identity labels, stands for. A description of Orlando's body right after the bizarre transformation transgresses the fixity of sexual identity: "No human being, since the world began, has

ever looked more ravishing. His form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace" (1998: 132–33)**.** His/Her body figure and manner are beyond scientific and psychological explanation. It is common to talk of a body which is hermaphrodite or intersexed, a physical abnormality in a body consisting of biological characteristics of both male and female sex. It is common to hear of descriptions of such atypical condition in offices where doctors analyse a patient's symptoms or in lawcourts where judges give verdicts and decide upon the fate and social identity of the prosecuted. It is not common, however, to talk of this strange phenomenon in Orlando's chamber. Orlando's body as an alternative utopia is a meeting place of both masculine and feminine beauty. Orlando's mind, likewise, is an integration of the nature of both sexes:

> she was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither; [...] she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each. It was a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind to be in. (Woolf 1998: 152)

Virginia Woolf not only charts an alternative utopia of the mind which encompasses all sexes but also puts the fixed labels of sexuality into question:

> That men cry as frequently and as 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. (1998: 172–73)

Sexuality, an identity categorised by society primarily on sexual preference and orientation, is often referred to in singular form when it is actually fluid and dynamic. It is often defined and classified through arbitrary labelling of the two mainstream sexualities: "man" and "woman," "masculine" and "feminine." Orlando blurs such rigid gender categories, rendering them porous in her deconstructive musings on the stereotypes of femininity: "for women are not […] obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature. They can only attain these graces, […], by the most tedious discipline" (Woolf 1998: 150) and on the stereotypes of masculinity:

> to deny a woman teaching lest she may laugh at you; to be the slave of the frailest chit in petticoats, and yet to go about as if you were the Lords of creation.—Heavens!' she thought, 'what fools they make of us—what fools we are!' (1998: 152)

The seed of Virginia Woolf's utopian vision in her oeuvre can be traced to her real-life events and personal aspirations. While writing *Orlando*, she was embracing new changes in her life. The Woolfs, for instance, bought their very first motorcar in 1927. "This is a great opening up in our lives," she exclaims, "One may go to Bodiam, to Arundel, explore the Chichester downs, expand that curious thing, the map of the world in ones mind. It will I think demolish loneliness, & may of course imperil complete privacy" (Bell 1982: 147). It is evident in her diary that the ability to explore physical places is the counterpart of an individual's ability to map new terrains of mental space, "the map of the world in ones mind." Virginia Woolf was so fascinated by her motoring experience that she repeatedly wrote about it. On Sunday 21 August 1927, for example, she noted:

> What I like, or one of the things I like, about motoring is the sense it gives one of lighting accidentally, like a voyager who touches another planet with the tip of his toe, upon scenes which would have gone on, have always gone on, will go on, unrecorded, save for this chance glimpse. Then it seems to me I am allowed to see the heart of the world uncovered for a moment. (Bell 1982: 153)

In *Orlando*, travelling in a motorcar not only brings comfort and convenience to city life and opens up a new horizon of adventures to the countryside, enriching tangible experiences, but also offers an opportunity for the mind to experience many fragmented scenes and slices of life, enhancing its ability to see the world in a new strange light:

> Nothing could be seen whole or read from start to finish. What was seen begun—like two friends starting to meet each other across the street—was never seen ended. After twenty minutes the body and mind were like scraps of torn paper tumbling from a sack and, indeed, the process of motoring fast out of London so much resembles the chopping up small of identity which precedes unconsciousness and perhaps death itself that it is an open question in what sense Orlando can be said to have existed at the present moment. (1998: 293)

The motorcar's rapid movement not only blurs our visual ability but also puts into question the fixity of time, place, and identity. The past and the present time lapse into one another. Technology of place is seen in the making. The "incomplete" concrete place, people, and activities one sees while passing by are combined with the abstract place, people, and activities which one imagines carrying on out of sight.

Apart from gender hybridity, *Orlando* also offers an alternative mental space which embraces people of every race, class, and religion. It paints a utopia where citizenship is free and available to all regardless of ethnicity, social status, and religious belief. This can be seen illustrated when Orlando, as a dashing young man and ambassador in Constantinople, joins the locals in their secular activity in marketplaces and in their spiritual worship in mosques. This he does by means of clothing and disguise:

> And sometimes, it is said, he would pass out of his own gates late at night so disguised that the sentries did not know him. Then he would mingle with the crowd on the Galata Bridge; or stroll through the bazaars; or throw aside his shoes and join the worshippers in the Mosques. (1998: 119)

The dream of an alternative utopian space which "connects," which integrates the experiences of people from a variety of social backgrounds, can be seen in Orlando's fluid association with every social class. Orlando is not only a member of the elite class but also of the working class. What is more, the working class people who accept her into their circle happen to practice what the society condemns as the lowest of all professions: prostitution. They are, in short, the marginalised of the marginalised: **"**These poor creatures, she ascertained, for Nell brought Prue, and Prue Kitty, and Kitty Rose, had a society of their own of which they now elected her a member" (Woolf 1998: 209). To be able to witness their actions "behind closed doors" and probe into their deepest thoughts is the greatest benefit which Orlando's hybrid identities bring. However, there are some doors that would forever remain a mystery as a testimony to social injustice which existed through the ages. History and biography tend to favour the rich and the powerful more than the poor and the powerless, the vibrant city more than the obscure countryside. In *Orlando*, during the Great Frost at the end of the 17th century, the gap between different social classes is shown to be more evident and dramatic: "But while the country people suffered the extremity of want, and the trade of the country was at a standstill, London enjoyed a carnival of the utmost brilliancy" (1998: 33). Kings, Queens, and nobles are the only people who manage to leave their imprints on history. They eat, drink, enjoy the limelight of London society and skate upon the frozen Thames:

> For himself and the courtiers, he [King James II] reserved a certain space immediately opposite the Palace gates; which, railed off from the public only by a silken rope, became at once the centre of the most brilliant society in England. (1998: 34)

Silk, a delicate and luxurious material which divides the ruling class and the rest of England, can be regarded as a metaphor for the fragility and constructedness of class barrier. It is through exclusion and exploitation that the dominant class of society prospers. While the city feasts and thrives on fun, games, and music, the peasants in the countryside remain, literally and metaphorically speaking, solidly frozen: "The severity of the frost was so extraordinary that a kind of petrifaction sometimes ensued" (Woolf 1998: 33).

7. Conclusion

The truthful yet fantastic portrayal of human identity and society in *Orlando* challenges our received notions regarding concepts of time and space. The past, present, and future are not mutually exclusive. The concrete "granite-like" place where we actually live and breathe merges and, at the same time, clashes with the abstract "rainbow-like" place of memories, emotions, and mental pictures. This leads to the questioning of place as a fixed entity. The utopian definitions of *eutopia* "good place" and *utopos* "no place," in the same manner, combine and collide in Orlando's mind when he/she attempts to make sense of time and space, of his/her selfhood and society. It is Orlando's alternative mental space that provides an arena where readers come to question the past and present social norms and practice, the rigid compartmentalisation of human identity in terms of gender, race, class, and religion. Virginia Woolf, in her supposedly "light" spoof biography, subtly encourages readers to continue dreaming the utopian dream of not only an alternative body and mind which resist the conventional pigeonholing of human identity but also an alternative society where people of every gender, race, class, and belief can live together in peace and true understanding.

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