



What if Jesus Had a Sister? : Virginia Woolf's Messianic
(re)Imaginings

Author(s): Fuhrer, Eric

Source: *eSharp*, Issue 14: Imagination and Innovation (Winter 2009),
pp. 01-22

URL: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/esharp>

ISSN: 1742-4542

Copyright in this work remains with the author.

eSharp is an international online journal for postgraduate research in the arts, humanities, social sciences and education. Based at the University of Glasgow and run by graduate students, it aims to provide a critical but supportive entry to academic publishing for emerging academics, including postgraduates and recent postdoctoral students.

esharp@gla.ac.uk

What if Jesus Had a Sister? : Virginia Woolf's Messianic (re)Imaginations

Erik Fuhrer (University of Glasgow)

In 'Divine Women', Luce Irigaray stresses the need for the construction of a female divine since,

There is no *woman* God, no female trinity: mother, daughter, spirit. This paralyzes the infinite becoming of a woman since she is fixed in the role of a mother through whom the *son* of God is made flesh. (Irigaray 1993, p.62)

This essay will gaze at the divine through a Woolfian lens and chart the ways in which Virginia Woolf re-imagines bodies and histories within the Christological incarnate figure of the New Testament. Beginning with *A Room of One's Own*, first published in 1929, it will establish Woolf's 'Shakespeare's sister' as a framework for understanding Messianic revisions in Woolf's work. Following this will be a reading of *Orlando*, from 1928, in which Christ's body will be read through the multi-gendered/sexed body of the title character, allowing for a more plural understanding of the Christological body. Queer theory will be used to elucidate this concept of the multi-gendered body. This will lead to an engagement with queer theology in order to explore the political and social ramifications and erotic potential of these bodies. The essay will end by elucidating how Woolf re-imagines the Magdalene/female prophet/Christa in her essay, 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' (2005). The result will be a queer, transgendered excavation and re-imagination of Biblical symbols that subverts the

canonical androcentric readings of *The Bible* and restores agency to the ‘other(s).’

While this essay is quite unique in its thesis, it draws on an established practice of writing about Woolf and spirituality. Jane Marcus’ early work and Jane Schaberg’s recent book, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* (2004), in which Woolf and her writing function as guides in the excavation of the historical Mary Magdalene, are examples of this tradition. This piece also follows in the rich tradition of theologians, such as Graham Ward (2007) and Gerard Loughlin (2007), who have offered a ‘queer’ reading of Christ for us all to share. Like Schaberg, I too use Woolf as a guide and

make no claim, of course, that Woolf’s writings accurately interpret biblical material or visa versa. But my claim is that they can be good, useful, and beautiful together: an oblong standing on a square. (Schaberg 2004, p.32).

De/Reconstructing Subjectivity

Virginia Woolf troubles Biblical waters by deconstructing the Christological body, and positing the messianic return of Shakespeare’s sister who, once resurrected, ‘will put on the body which she has so often laid down’ (2004, p.132). Shakespeare’s sister is Woolf’s symbol of the repressed feminine body (of flesh, of bone, of work), and can also be understood as Jesus’ sister, the ‘other,’ ‘feminine’ presence obscured and denied the subjectivity by the patriarchy, who has claimed the ‘I’ for their own. ‘Call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael, or by any name you please’ (Woolf 2004, p.5)... well, what about Mary Magdalene: the apostle, the saint, the first observer of Jesus’ risen ‘flesh,’ and, arguably, his mythical successor? As Woolf insists, whatever you call her, ‘it is not a matter of importance,’ for this is not a case of a simple resurrection of one woman, or even women as a whole, but a resurrection of the

communal voices and bodies of all the suppressed, forgotten, eradicated and scourged (2004, p.5). ‘She is not Virginia Woolf standing on the platform but the voice of the anonymous female victim[s] of male violence through the ages,’ the voice of all victims (Marcus 1987, p.149). What if Jesus had a sister? The question stands tall against the ‘I,’ interrogates it, castigates it, castrates it... disassembles it into a plurality, a multiplicity, a ‘we’: ‘Indeed the platform is so crowded with conspirators that when Woolf says ‘I’ we read it and hear it as ‘we,’ and her written ‘I’ has no five-o’clock shadow, no resemblance to the ‘straight dark bar’ on the patriarchal cage’ (Marcus 1987, p.159).

The Body of Christ: Now it is Two

Virginia Woolf’s imaginative comparison of Orlando and Christ in her mock biography, *Orlando*, provides a fruitful discourse for exploring the fluidity of the re/deconstructed body and, I will argue, the re/deconstructed body of Christ. The parallel commences when Orlando travels from London to Constantinople as an ambassador. Here he goes through the rituals of a statesman and is

undoubtedly fatigued by them, and often depressed to such a pitch of gloom that he preferred to take his dinner alone with his dogs. To them, indeed he might be heard talking in his own tongue (Woolf 2003, p.60).

At these dinners, Orlando’s status is elevated above that of the dogs by the fact that he has his own distinct language. Considering that this scene immediately precedes a more direct religious allusion (explicated below), it is possible to view the current imagery through the same lens. Consequently, Orlando can be read as a prophet, whose speaking in tongues both eludes and invites the listeners, who seemingly make no attempt to escape his presence. Woolf perhaps chose to depict an audience of dogs as opposed to people in order to

provide an allegorical commentary on their dehumanization. As Jane Goldman writes,

Marking and marked by race, gender and class, Woolf's signifying dog is a constructed, monstrous, multivalent figure whose 'referent' is certainly not just a dog, but nor, contra Adams, does this metaphor cleanly evacuate the dog from its vehicle merely to accommodate 'woman' or 'slave' (Woolf gestures to both). (2007, p.50).

The literal dogs dining with Orlando signify the oppression of those who have carried these metaphors in their muzzled mouths. Notice the phrasing: 'his own tongue' rather than 'their tongue' or a 'shared tongue.' Not allowed a voice, a tongue of their own, they are forced to swallow the language of the ruler. Perhaps the muzzle is doing its job here, for the paragraph does not say that the dogs attempted to speak back. This scene seems to be a satirical reconstruction of Jesus speaking to/at his disciples and others during sermons and meals. It is a harsh revision of the Biblical Christ, whose image in the Gospels is often interpreted as that of an inviting prophet of peace and community:

That he was open to all comers is manifest in his ragged assortment of followers which gathered around him, and included sinners and publicans, prostitutes, and the sick and poor, all marginalized in one way or another by society. (Haskins 1993, p.27).

However, perhaps it is not specifically the Biblical Jesus that Woolf is critiquing here, but the official Church, which has historically used Christ and the Godhead as a tool of separation. For his unique quality of Godliness, his transfiguration, his bodily yet spiritual resurrection and his identification as male have been used to distance him from the 'less holy' and to uphold the damaging Western body/soul binary. Elizabeth Spellman describes the fundamentals of this binary as follows:

According to Plato, the body, [...] keeps us from real knowledge; [...] It is in and through the soul, if at all, that we shall have knowledge [...] for only the soul can ascend to the real world, the world of Forms or Ideas. (1999, p.34)

Jesus is worthy, as he is fully or partially of the spirit. He can ‘ascend’ and prosper. White men, the closest physically to the Western conception of Christ, share in the splendor of the spirit world; for example, they are allowed access to the priesthood. Women and social minorities have long been denied such inclusion. This is why when Spellman questions ‘whose lives exemplify the proper soul/body relationship gone haywire?’, she immediately answers, without need for thought: ‘The lives of women (or sometimes the lives of children, slaves, and brutes)’ (1999, p.37).

Couple this scene with the dogs with a similar scene, only 3 sentences later:

Once, when it was given out that he was ill of a fever, shepherds, bringing their goats to market, reported that they had met an English Lord on the mountain top and heard him praying to his God. This was thought to be Orlando himself, and his prayer was, no doubt, a poem said aloud, for it was known that he still carried about with him, in the bosom of his cloak, a much scored manuscript. (Woolf 2003, p.60)

The prophet is now solitary, and the mockery of him nearly reaches a level of high comedy when one remembers the manuscripts title, ‘The Oak Tree’. Orlando’s speech/poem to God therefore becomes a metaphorical masturbation, with him ejaculating the words of this constructed poetic phallus (an irony as the poem is not finished when Orlando is a man, but when he is a woman, which perhaps signals a further mockery of him in this scene: Big important man with an incomplete Oak Tree).

Though the scenes just discussed provide a framework for Christological allusions, it is in the moments leading to the insurrection of the city, and of Orlando's body, that his transformation into a Christological figure mainly occurs. The scene begins when 'John Fenner Brigge, [...] an English naval officer, [...] climbed into a Judas tree, the better to observe proceedings' (Woolf 2003, p.61-62). This is reminiscent of Zacchaeu's, the tax collector, who in Luke 19, climbed into a sycamore tree in order to better see Jesus and thus prefigures Orlando as Jesus:

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeu's; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran ahead and climbed into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. (Luke.19.1-5).

Furthermore, like Jesus, Orlando is soon equipped with potential healing powers: 'The rumour had got about among the natives [...] that some kind of miracle was to be performed' (Woolf 2003, p.62). Ironically, a miracle is never performed, as after Orlando 'rais[es] himself proudly erect' and places the 'golden circlet of leaves [...] upon his brows,' the first disturbance [begins]' (Woolf 2003, p.63). The potency of Orlando's erect, phallic body, with the power to perform miracles is undercut by the insurrection. As Orlando's biographer writes:

Either the people had expected a miracle— some say a shower of gold was prophesied to fall from the skies— which did not happen, or this [the placing of the coronet] was the signal chosen for the attack to begin. (Woolf 2003, p.63)

So Orlando, the imperial Christ figure prophesied to perform a miracle and 'save' the people, is proven impotent and like Christ is

betrayed by an action: Christ by a kiss and Orlando by a crowning. Through such a revision, Woolf seems also to be questioning Jesus' Biblical potency and his status as savior.

After the famous sex change heralded by the shafts of phallic trumpets ('while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! We have no choice but confess— he was a woman'(Woolf 2003, p.67), it is apparent that a woman is not the only thing Orlando signifies:

There, in the shadow of a giant fig tree, waited an old gipsy on a donkey. He led another by the bridle. Orlando swung her leg over it; and thus; attended by a lean dog, riding a donkey, in company of a gipsy, the Ambassador of Great Britain at the Court of the Sultan left Constantinople. (Woolf 2003, p.67-68)

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, pre-resurrection, in anticipation of the crucifixion, Orlando, post-*transformation*, leaves Constantinople. Incidentally, after leaving, she completes the 'Oak Tree'. Orlando is the female poet, resurrected; Shakespeare's sister in the flesh.

This re-gendering, however, is soon questioned, as is apparent in the shifting of gender and gender pronouns such as those found in the following passage where the female Orlando, dressed as a man, comes upon a young woman:

Orlando swept her hat off to her in a manner of a gallant paying his address to a lady of fashion in a public place. The young woman raised her eyes. Orlando saw them to be of a lustre such as is sometimes seen on teapots but rarely in a human face. Through this silver glaze the young woman looked up at him (for a man he was to her) appealing, hoping, trembling, fearing. (Woolf 2003, p.107)

The passage continues with the woman, now revealed as being named Nell, bringing Orlando to her room, where Orlando reveals the 'truth':

In the strangest torment of anger, merriment, and pity she flung off all the disguise and admitted herself a woman. At this, Nell burst into such a roar of laughter as might have been heard across the way. (Woolf 2003, p.107)

Her laughter is evidence of the fact that she did not detect Orlando's masquerade before it was explicitly revealed. Thus, Orlando's dress seems to fully disguise her sex, to reverse the sex-change process. 'It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex' (Woolf 2003, p.92). Gender here is being offered as a choice, as a performance, a la Judith Butler:

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principal of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.' (Butler 1999, p.417)

The outer inscriptions of Orlando's body signified by her clothing are what *perform* her identity as a coherent sex. The bodily markings of clothing suggest that sex is a static norm that relates to the external construction of this body. Sex though, is more plural than that:

Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above. (Woolf 2003, p.92-93)

While the clothes give the illusion of a stable body, the genitalia is in constant transformation. Woolf specifically uses the term 'intermixing,' which implies that there are moments when male and

female genitalia join into one. We should therefore understand the ‘vacillation’ Woolf speaks of in the next line as a multi-step process of various inter-sexed genitalia formations, rather than just a direct shift between recognizable male and female parts. This mixing of the sexes echoes Woolf’s theory of the androgynous mind:

the normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. 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. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous (Woolf 2004, p. 113)

This integration of the sexes within the mind requires that both sexes be already present. Woolf presenting the merging as ‘intercourse’ implies that the mind mimics the body in its internal conjoining; which thereby also suggests the duality of the flesh and subsequently revokes the concept of the body as a homogenous identifiable sex. Through this lens, Woolf’s characters are therefore sexually unidentifiable. Their complicated multitude of intersexual possibilities defies definition. Judith Halberstam, writing over a half century after Woolf, continues Woolf’s project:

the breakdown of genders and sexualities into identities is in many way, therefore, an endless project, and it is perhaps preferable therefore to acknowledge that gender is defined by its transitivity, that sexuality manifests as multiple sexualities, and that therefore we are all transsexuals. There are no transsexuals. (1999, p.132)

Halberstam recognizes the futility of fixed categories and therefore encourages an ideology that embraces fluidity and change. We are all more complicated than ordinary male or female bodily assumptions. We are plural. Virginia Woolf acknowledged this and applied this to all people, even Christ.

What if Jesus had a Penis?

At first glance the effort to dismiss the image of the white, pierced, male, flesh of the crucifixion erected high above the priest in the tall tower of a church, seems futile. One would therefore expect the same futility to mark the attempt to tell the life of Orlando, a patriarchal nightmare who begins the 'biography' 'in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters' (Woolf 2003, p.5). However, as discussed above, Woolf swiftly mocks and then disassembles the phallic power of this character, flattening the horizon and providing a model of bodily deconstruction and re-arrangement. It is through this allegorical Christ figure, Orlando, that one is able to imagine the smooth, de-sexed, body of Christ, and ponder about its various manifestations.

Firstly, to turn the task to the reader: when asked to recall an image of Jesus, what is it one sees? For the majority of people, especially Westerners, the dominant image would probably be that of an attractive man with fair skin, long brown hair and a brown beard. 'An Anglo-Saxon movie star surrounded by a constant halo tweaked by a diffusion filter' perhaps (Jordan 2007, p.281). If it is a full-body portrait that one's mind calls up, one might picture him robed and sandaled. However, speaking of full body portraits, how about another exercise of the imagination: What does Jesus look like naked? Mark Jordan argues that 'Christian traditions consider it important that Jesus was a male, both because he needed some sex/gender and because he had the sex/gender that claims particular privileges and powers' (2007, p.283). He then finds it perplexing that 'Christian traditions haven't often considered it important to reflect on what made Jesus male—that is, on the fact that the incarnate God had genitals of a certain configuration' (Jordan 2007, p.283). It is in

fact perplexing: How could they claim unequivocally that Jesus *was* a man if they never probed beneath his wardrobe?

In their book *Controversies in Feminist Theology*, Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid discuss the gender bending in the story of Thecla, found in Deuteronomy. The fact that Thecla ‘only cross-dresses after baptism’ leads them to reject the ‘argument that she and others cross-dressed for the sake of safety when they were on missionary journeys’ (Althaus-Reid & Isherwood 2007, p.19-20). They suggest instead that Thecla and those they feel to be precursors to Thecla

queered gender-performance in order to find a way of living the radical equality they professed to believe. After all once we engage in confusing the categories it leads to their breakdown as oppositional points of reference. It seems entirely possible that these stories of gender-bending were written by and for women who wished to subvert the social order. (Althaus-Reid & Isherwood 2007, p.21)

These women, dressing as men, were crossing over boundaries. This Biblical gender-crossing is continued and complicated by Jesus in the New Testament. Susan Heschell points out that:

from the gospel accounts, modern scholars found that Jesus’ teachings laud gentleness, the meek, and the cheek; he is himself pierced, wounded; he bleeds, suffers, and dies. At the same time, however, he is a man whose closest associates are men, not women; who proclaims himself one with the Father; whose death is overcome by the erection of the resurrection. (1997, p.192)

However, this description seems to focus more on gendered character traits than it does bodily inscriptions. But it goes deeper than that, such as when Thomas, doubting Jesus after the resurrection, is asked to feel Jesus’ wounds. ‘Thomas touches the raw flesh of Jesus, placing his hand into the very wound that in John is

symbolic of the vaginal opening through which the community of Christ's body is born' (Ward 2007, p.78). A sexual penetration begins with 'Jesus as a hermaphrodite and Thomas [...] opening up the womb of Christ' (Ward 2007, p.78). Ward's reading of Jesus's body as an intersexed body with womb-like hands implies that Jesus' open wounds are an extension of his sexual 'biology' and that they provide multiple 'genital' sites that pluralize his sexual identity. Therefore, Jesus' body is not merely crossing over gender-lines, rather it is challenging the very notion of gender binaries by resisting categorization. No matter what Jesus actually had 'down below,' it is evident that Jesus' body was a lot more complex than the typical images of him allow.

Mark Jordan writes that 'the big business of theology has been to construct alternate bodies for Jesus the Christ-- tidier bodies' and that this has led to the fact that most crucifixes are 'shockingly detailed, except in the lower abdomen, which was as smooth and abstract as an old fashioned manikin' (2004, p.283). What if the fear of assigning the penis to the Christ's anatomy lies not only in the fear of sexuality itself, but in the fear that a penis would misrepresent him? For he spent an awful a lot of time with women and if the patriarchal and pious interpreters of the Church must deny sexual attraction in order to deny the body, how else are they, in all of their phallogocentric, masculine greatness, to explain this communion? How to properly explain how their hero, with whose phallus they have cleaved bodies into distinct genders for years, spoke the 'feminine' words of love? If sex does relate to gender, if having a vagina does really denote a feminine state of mind and soul, and contrariwise, as the traditional church seems to believe, then is it not very likely, theoretically (oh of course) that Jesus had a vagina? It is no more blasphemous to claim this then to unequivocally assign a feminine

personality a penis in a patriarchal world where sexual difference is correlative with gender norms. It is clear that this must have caused much anxiety in the Church, whose main male symbol, other than Jesus, is a man with a gigantic phallic hat. The solution apparently was to avoid the situation completely by placing a cloth over his genital area. With that decision, Christ was castrated and his sex hidden away. One can imagine that sculptors, while smoothing the surface of Jesus' crotch, were often inspired to penetrate the wood with their scalpels... only to be caught by that angel in the Vatican... that is, until Christa, a large nude female Christ on the cross, sculpted by Edwina Sandy (for more information on female representations of Christ in art, see Clague 2005). This sculpture effectively divided the Church. According to the New York Times, Bishop D. Dennis, a critic of the sculpture, called it 'symbolically reprehensible' and 'theologically and historically indefensible' (quoted in Clague 2005, p.32). The Times continues, stating that

Bishop Dennis said he did not object to 'enhancing' symbols of Jesus by casting them in different skin colors of ethnic characteristics. But he said the statue went too far by 'totally changing the symbol.'
(quoted in Clague 2005, p.32)

It is perplexing that changing/adding race or ethnicity is seen as 'enhancing' Christ's body but changing/adding sex is seen as deforming it. The same happens when one adds a queer element to Christ. For instance, the 1999 play, 'Corpus Christi,' that 'caused an outcry among Christians when it was staged during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival during the summer' (BBC 1999). Furthermore, 'Terrence McNally [the playwright] was sentenced to death by the Shari'ah Court of the UK as his play, Corpus Christi, opened in London on Thursday night' (BBC 1999). This unfortunate mis-

reading of Jesus as rigidly masculine and heterosexual is a product of a patriarchal culture that deliberately denies the sexuality of the scene with Thomas.¹ It seems that in order to uphold this heteronormative reading of Jesus, one must also overlook the fact that ‘in the gospels, Christ is husband to the church, he is the bridegroom of new Israel’ and that this is, very clearly, a ‘queer kind of marriage: the bonding of men in matrimony’ (Loughlin 2007, p.2). The following section will address these issues by freeze-framing the fluid body and identity of Christ in a role that has not yet been read into the character: What if Jesus was a lesbian?

Mary Liked Mary. They Shared a Womb Together

The title of this section is a revision of Woolf’s line from *A Room of One’s Own*: ‘Chloe liked Olivia. They shared a laboratory together’ (2004, p.96). Woolf writes that

if Chloe likes Olivia and Mary Carmichael [the writer of their story] knows how to express it she will light a torch in that vast chamber where nobody has yet been. It is all half lights and profound shadows like those serpentine caves where one goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where one is stepping.
(2004, p.98)

Therefore this laboratory is a subterranean place, beneath the surface, ‘a submarine lesbian utopia’ (Marcus 1987, p.155). Does Mary Carmichael also come to this laboratory once in a while? And what about the Virgin Mary? Well... it’s a bit too dark in here to see if they are there. ‘Let there be light’ God says. ‘Thank you God’, Jane Marcus would say, as she believes that ‘the inner chamber receives

¹ An earlier manifestation of this type of intolerance can be found in the case of James Kirkup’s poem, ‘The Love that Dares Speak its Name,’ about a centurion having a sexual relationship with Jesus. This poem was banned and the editor of Gay News, who published it, sentenced to jail and fined. (See Pink News 2008).

the light as Mary received Christ from the Holy Spirit' (1987, p.135). If Marcus statement is correct, then this means God condones this inner space as much as he did the womb of the 'virgin' Mary.

The womb, according to Irigaray, is itself a possible lesbian site:

it is important to remind ourselves that, since the first body we as women had to relate to was a woman's body and our first love is the love of the mother, women always have an ancient and primary relationship to what is called homosexuality. Men, on the other hand, always have an ancient relationship to heterosexuality, since their first love object is a woman.
(1993, p.20)

If Mary truly was a virgin at conception, then the experience of Christ in the womb was also her first sexual experience. If Jesus body is fluid, as explained above then it could have as easily been a 'female' in the 'virgin' womb, and thus qualify as a lesbian experience (or at least an alternate to the hetero-normative model that involved non-male bodies). Elizabeth Stuart writes: 'Jesus is born male but from purely female matter, he emerges from the womb in a complex web of symbolic relationships with his virgin mother' (2004, p.65). But what if Jesus had a vagina? What web is being weaved then?

Marina Warner points out that in early Christian paintings and traditions Mary Magdalene was seen as bride, and therefore potential sexual partner, of Christ beyond the womb:

in the twelfth century mosaic of S. Maria in Trastevere, this imagery becomes explicit: Mary, triumphantly assumed into heaven and embraced by Christ, prefigures the Church's future glory and the soul's promised union with Christ in terms of the mystical love song, the *Cantica Cantarum*, or Song of Songs. Her youthful beauty, unquestioningly accepted from this date on, has a theological purpose: the Virgin is no dowager queen

mother, but the beloved Shulamite, bride of Christ.
(2000, p.122)

I therefore ask again: what if Jesus had a vagina? Imagine this painting, hanging above the Priest when he gave a sermon. Mary and Mary, sharing a womb, a life, a kiss together.

Virginia Woolf and the Signifying Foot : Mary Magdalene Buys a Pair of Shoes

In 'Street Haunting' Christ's body takes the form not only of a woman, but of a dwarf: reformed, deformed, and renewed. The essay begins when Woolf's narrator escapes the indoors to 'indulge safely in the greatest pleasure of town life in winter—rambling the streets of London' (2005, p.1). But just for cover, she has brought along her pencil, 'so that when the desire comes upon us to go street rambling the pencil does for a pretext' (Woolf 2005, p.1). Good, something solid, something patriarchal, one can write traditional essays with this, nothing strange here... nothing subversive. Don't worry dad... don't worry God... I won't stray from the Law.

But when the door shuts on us, all that vanishes. The shell-like covering which our souls have excreted to house themselves, to make for themselves a shape distinct from others, is broken, and there is left of all these wrinkles and roughnesses a central oyster of perceptiveness, an enormous eye. (Woolf 2005, p.2)

So much for the stiffness of the pencil, things are dispersed. But this 'soul' Woolf talks about is not the phallic model that transcends the body. Rather, it is completely of the body, a reforming of the body. A pushing at the edges of the body until they split and out oozes the stuff we are made of (an ejaculation that can be claimed for all). The 'truth' spills over into other bodies, creating an enormous 'eye.' 'A corollary, then, the move from self to anonymity is the change from

‘I’ to eye, from pronoun to organ’ (Bowlby 1997, p.210).
Subjectivity is discarded for fluidity:

After all, we are only gliding smoothly on the surface.
The eye is not a miner, not a diver, not a seeker after
buried treasure. It floats us smoothly down a stream;
resting, pausing, the brain sleep perhaps as it looks.
(Woolf 2005, p.3)

According to Joanna Garvey, ‘Woolf employs water imagery to reveal differences within apparent unity, to undermine patriarchal institutions such as marriage, and ultimately to create a female vision of the cityscape’ (Garvey 1991, p.60). However, here it seems not just a creating of the feminine, but the androgynous, as symbolized by the eye, an ungendered, biologically unsexed, organ.

This eye can therefore take on any form, being plural and morphable. Therefore, ‘we may ask, as we raise our left foot obediently upon the stand: ‘What then is it like to be a dwarf?’ (Woolf 2005, p.4). The narrator immediately morphs into a female dwarf: ‘She came in escorted by two women, who, being of normal size, looked like benevolent giants beside her’ (Woolf 2005, p.4). Here we have a queer trinity that mocks the phallic trinity, the members of which traditionally harbor masculine signifiers (God the Father, Jesus the Son). This ‘feminine’ trinity is further ‘queered’ by the divisions of size due to the ‘deformity’ of the narrator’s new imagined body. According to Maria Dibattista,

Woolf typically resorts to an imaginative scene to dramatize the aesthetic problems confronting a woman whose humanity and imagination traditionally have been circumscribed, restricted, and dwarfed by the single fact of her sex. (1980, p.123)

Woolf here takes the dwarfing quite literally, satirically embodying this diminished humanity forced upon women by patriarchy. But there was one part of her that was not dwarfed, that was ‘beautiful’:

Look at that! Look at that! she seemed to demand of us all, as she thrust out her foot, for behold it was the shapely, perfectly proportioned foot of a well-grown woman. It was arched; it was aristocratic. (Woolf 2005, p. 4-5)

Feet, Bowlby reminds us, are the ‘classic choice of male fetishism’ (1997, p.215). However they also have Biblical resonance. For instance, the scene in Luke with the ‘sinner’ (who was one of the women traditionally conflated with Mary Magdalene):

And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat at the Pharisees house, brought an Alabaster box of ointment. And stood at his feet and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed *them* with the ointment. (Luke. 7.37-38)

Here, however, the shoe is on the other foot, since it is not Jesus the male prophet whose feet are being attended to, but the malformed dwarf, representative of the neglected and shunned. Woolf cuts the prophet down to size and allows the shop girls to baptize her feet not with oil, but with shoes:

she sent for shoe after shoe; she tried on pair after pair. She got up and pirouetted before a glass which reflected the foot only in yellow shoes, in fawn shoes, in shoes of lizard skin. She raised her little skirts and displayed her little legs. She was thinking that, after all, feet are the most important part of the whole person; women, she said to herself, have been loved for their feet alone. Seeing nothing but her feet, she imagined perhaps that the rest of her body was of a piece with those beautiful feet. She was shabbily dressed, but she was ready to lavish any money upon her shoes. And as this was the only occasion upon which she was not afraid of being looked at but positively craved attention, she was ready to use any device to prolong the choosing and fitting. Look at

my feet, she seemed to be saying, as she took a step this way then a step that way. The shop girl good-humouredly must have said something flattering, for suddenly her face lit up in ecstasy.' (2005, p.5)

Considering the common misconception that Mary Magdalene washed Jesus' feet with her hair, could this Dwarf be a re-imagining of the composite Mary Magdalene, with her now set as beloved prophet and Jesus in the role as fawner and slave/'whore?' If so, the prophet is now commodified, herself indulging in the practice of whoredom, selling her feet for a moment of pleasure. Therefore this switch blurs the boundaries a bit between prophet and whore. The whole world is seen through the lens of prostitution, through the power dynamics set up by the selling of commodities: the prostitute sells her body for money, the shop girl sells shoes and her time, for a wage, Jesus sells his Messianic discourse for an abundance of pious followers. You are a whore/ you are not a whore. 'I am a whore/ I am not a whore. And so what if I am? What is a whore anyway? [Then quoting Woolf:] 'We are neither of us chaste' (Schaeberg 2004, p.80).

However, the performance must soon end:

After all, the giantesses, benevolent though they were, had their own affairs to see to; she must make up her mind; she must decide which to choose. At length, the pair was chosen and, as she walked out between her guardians, with the parcel swinging from her finger, the ecstasy faded, knowledge returned, the old peevishness, the old apology came back, and by the time she had reached the street again she had become a dwarf only. (Woolf 2005, p.5)

The power dynamics have shifted, she is no longer in control of what part of her body is commodified. Her prophetic signifiers are again shoed and she is silenced. A dwarf again. A misfit. An unwanted. Someone without any material agency. But Woolf's

dwarf again reconstructs Jesus, as his healing powers are now reconfigured. Instead of healing, the dwarf deforms, or perhaps reveals ‘truths’ about, people in the street. They are turned as ‘grotesque’ as her: she had called into being an atmosphere, which, as we followed her out into the street, seemed actually to create the humped, the twisted, the deformed (Woolf 2005, p.5). The dwarf still has agency over the imagination. That, in the raw, cannot be commodified, and she spreads it across the streets, a liquid spell, a fish darting and turning the world gray. Here Woolf blurs the lines again, this time between reality and the imagination. Because, let us remember, there is not really a dwarf anyway, it is only the narrator’s imagination. And, hold on, let us backtrack some more, the narrator is not even a separate person from this crowd of people on the street either. They are all part of an enormous ‘I’ spilling out across the streets. A large ejaculation of the mind. The androgynous mind. We are all real, we are none of us real.

Bibliography

- Althaus-Reid, Marcella & Isherwood, Lisa. 2007. *Controversies in Feminist Theology*. London: SCM Press.
- Bowlby, Rachel. 1997. *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1999. Bodily Inscriptions: Performative Subversions. In Janet Price & Margrit Shildrick (eds.), *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, 416-422. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Clague, Julie. 2005. Symbolism and the Power of art: Female Representations of Christ Crucified. In Darlene Bird & Yvonne Sherwood (eds.), *Bodies in Question*, 25-56. Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Dibattista, Maria. 1980. *Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon*. Yale: Yale University Press.

- BBC News. 1999. Fatwa for 'gay Jesus' writer. In *BBC News*.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/493436.stm> (1 September 2009).
- Garvey, Johanna X.K. 1991. Difference and Continuity: The Voices of Mrs. Dalloway. *College English*, 53(1). 59-76.
- Goldman, Jane. 2007. 'Ce chien est a moi': Virginia Woolf and the Signifying Dog. *Woolf Studies Annual*, 13. 49-86.
- Halberstam, Judith. 1999. F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity. In Janet Price & Margrit Shildrick (eds.), *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, 125-133. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Haskins, Susan. 1993. *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Heschel, Susannah. 1997. Jesus as Theological Transvestite. In M. Pescowitz (ed) *Judaism Since Gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Irigaray, Luce. 1993. *Sexes and Genealogies*. Trans. Gillian C. Hill. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jordan, Mark. 2007. God's Body. In Gerard Loughlin (ed) *Queer Theology: RethinkingThe Western Body*, 281-292. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Loughlin, Gerard. Introduction: The End of Sex. In Gerard Loughlin (ed) *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, 1-34. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Marcus, Jane. 1987. *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Schaeberg, Jane. 2004. *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Spellman, Elizabeth V. Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views. In Janet Price & Margrit Shildrick (eds.), *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, 32-41. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Stuart, Elizabeth. Sacramental Flesh. In Gerard Loughlin (ed) *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, 65-75. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Pink News. 2008. The Gay Poem that Broke Blasphemy Laws. In *Pink News*. "<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-6519.html>" (1 September 2009)
- The New Oxford Annotated Bible: With the Apocrypha*. 1997. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ward, Graham. "There is no Sexual Difference." In Gerard Loughlin (ed) *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, 76-85. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Warner, Marina. 2000. *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*. London: Vintage.
- Woolf, Virginia. 2004. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Penguin Books.
- Woolf, Virginia. 2003. *Orlando*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics.
- Woolf, Virginia. 2005. 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure.' London: Penguin Books.