Metaphor of Travel: 
Virginia Woolf’s Orlando (1928)

by Chin-yuan Hu

Citation:

Abstract:
Virginia Woolf’s Orlando: A Biography (1928) is a travel narrative about Orlando’s becoming-woman through boundary crossings. The time of Orlando’s life spans 340 years; the places of Orlando’s travel bridge “the familiar” (England) and “the foreign” (Turkey). Appropriately enough, travel being a metaphor of boundary crossing witnesses the process of Orlando’s gender crossing, which happens after his spatial boundary crossing from Turkey to England. That Orlando has to go through the other place/culture (the foreign) to “become a woman” so that s/he eventually “become-woman” suggests that the tradition of English literature and culture needs a new mode to transform its desire, experience and knowledge. And this alternative is not the feminine mode opposing the masculine mode in the Oedipus structure, but the molecular mode that transcends the male/female binary opposition. The present essay explores the metaphor of travel in Orlando in the light of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of nomadology. In view of Orlando’s boundary crossings and constant becomings, the present essay argues that Orlando/Orlando is a prototype of nomadic travel, and eventually a metaphor of travel.

Keywords:
Orlando/Orlando, travel, metaphor, becomings, boundary crossing, Nomadology

Copyright:
"Metaphor of Travel: Virginia Woolf’s Orlando (1928).” (by Chin-yuan Hu) by Coldnoon: Travel Poetics is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at www.coldnoon.com.
METAPHOR OF TRAVEL:  
Virginia Woolf’s Orlando (1928)

by Chin-yuan Hu

In Travel Writing: The Self and the World, Casey Blanton points out that travel writing as a literary genre was “firmly established” by the 20th century (59). It is not just because many writers have accomplished a significant number of excellent works. More importantly, travel as metaphor for the discovery of the self has been applied to many travel and non-travel writings.

According to Blanton’s studies, it is precisely the phenomena of traveling and living abroad, writing to explore the significance of life, and presenting these issues with travel writing that characterize the modern period whose keynote features “discontent” and “self-examination” (59). Sharing Blanton’s insight, Caren Kaplan observes that “this propensity of occidental ‘moderns’ to look ‘elsewhere’ for markers of reality and authenticity” is a primary facet of Euro-American modernity (34). She says: “The quest for better models, newer forms, fresher images, and relief from the ills of metropolitan centers compels the modernist to move further and further into places perceived as the margins of the world” (ibid). Most notably, a peculiar aspect of this form of modernity is “a complicated tension between space and time” (35), which is represented and highlighted in many early 20th century travel writing.

On the other hand, in modernist works, the theme of the discovery of the self was rendered through the metaphor of travel: “The theme of self-discovery or, more accurately, the search for a shattered and scattered self that one sees in much modernist literature is itself often expressed in terms of travel” (Blanton, 59). Works of this kind include James Joyce’s Ulysses, T. S. Eliot’s The Waste Land, Ernest Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises, Christopher Isherwood’s Goodbye to Berlin, and Graham Greene’s Journey without Maps.
Having observed this phenomenon, Samuel Hynes thus declares that “travel metaphor” is “the basic trope of the generation [the 1920s and 30s]” (Blanton 59-60).

However, before “travel metaphor” can be well taken, our first question remains to be the definition of “travel.” According to Oxford Dictionary, to travel is “to go from one place to another, especially over a long distance,” indicating that “moving over a long distance” defines travel. Likewise, Georges Van Den Abbeele proposes that the definition of travel is based on “the transport of a person from the place where one is to another place that is far enough away” (xv). As there are differences of culture, language, religion, and ethnicity between “the place” and “another place that is far enough away,” the “transport” from one place to another is an act of boundary crossing. The traveler experiences the differences with a round-trip, encounters the other and searches for the self. “Boundary crossing” can thus be perceived as a metaphor of travel.

What is a metaphor then? According to traditional analogy, a metaphor is an implicit and indirect comparison of two things with similarity resulting in a rhetoric transformation. In other words, a metaphor departs from the literal. As M. H. Abrams explains, this view of metaphor claims that “the ordinary use of language is pervasively and indispensably metaphorical, and that metaphor persistently and profoundly structures the ways human beings perceive, what they know, and how they think” (157). Using metaphors is a cognitive activity practiced in daily life. A metaphor is not only a literal description and a transformative recognition, but also a view of things and a part of conceptual system.

Based on a cognitive viewpoint, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson further develop a “conceptual metaphor theory”: in the process of comprehending or practicing a metaphor, some qualities of “source domain” are triggered and mapped to “target domain” in parallel with each other. In so doing, a metaphor extends the meaning of target domain, concretizes an abstract idea, and changes our comprehension of target domain. A conceptual metaphor thus consists of “source domain” and “target domain,” in which one domain is understood in terms of the other.

Taking “travel” as a “source domain” and Woolf’s Orlando as a “target domain,” the present essay argues that “boundary crossing,”
“deterritorialization” and “becoming” that characterize travel help us understand Orlando in a new light. And more importantly, they also verify the meaning of travel, transforming Orlando into a metaphor of travel.¹ In such a context, a metaphor initiates an in-depth understanding of the world, compelling us to create and to describe the world in a distinctive way. A metaphor, indeed, is “central to our understanding of ourselves, our culture and the world at large” (Lakoff 1989: 214).

I. Travel: Boundary Crossing

Woolf’s Orlando: A Biography (1928) is a travel narrative about Orlando’s becoming-woman through boundary crossings. The time of Orlando’s life spans 340 years (1588-1928); the places of Orlando’s travel bridge “the familiar” (England) and “the foreign” (Turkey).

In Orlando, Turkey, an oriental country, stands for the foreign and the unknown. It is also a location for escape from perplexity and frustration as well as an imaginative land filled with possibilities that a person could ever long for. England, on the other hand, represents the familiar, the homeland that a traveler must return to. As such, we see that Orlando hinges on “travel,” probing into the difference between the foreign and the familiar.

In the novel, Orlando’s boundary crossing of gender is presented with the metaphor of travel. As Orlando’s “becoming a woman” does not occur until he leaves England for Turkey, travel, as a metaphor, pertinently shows Orlando’s transformation from a man to a woman. And most notably, Orlando has a round-trip ticket for this gender-crossing. After returning to England,

¹ Since its publication in 1928, Orlando: A Biography has been the subject of numerous scholarly studies. Written by Virginia Woolf, Orlando touches upon gender issues in an avant-garde way, making Orlando the title and Orlando the protagonist the emblems of “women’s writing.” A project on the history of women’s writing in the British Isles named after Orlando is one of the many cases in point. Against the grain with “women’s writing,” the present essay demonstrates that the issues Orlando touches upon include not only women’s writing, but also nature, poetics, history, culture, travel and individual movement, all of which cannot be covered under a single rubric of “women’s writing.”
Orlando verifies the difference s/he experiences in Turkey and thereby redefines his/her English poetic legacies.

Having Orlando transform to a woman in a foreign country, Woolf explicitly suggests that literary and cultural legacies of England succeeded by Orlando require a new mode to reconstruct its desire, experience, and identity. Instead of being the male-female mode in the Oedipus structure, this new mode is a molecular one that transcends the binary opposition of genders while highlighting versatile, heterogeneous differences.

The present essay turns to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s theory of nomadology to look into the theme of travel in Orlando. In view of Orlando’s boundary crossings and ceaseless becomings, the present essay argues that Orlando/Orlando be a prototype of nomadic travel and eventually become a metaphor of travel.2

In A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia and other works, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept of nomadology to explore the possibilities for an individual to mobilize his/her desire. In its resistance against the appropriation of the State Apparatus, nomadology resorts to “deterritorialization” to achieve autonomy. In the meantime, nomadology constructs “a very special kind of space, smooth space” to pursue change and transformation (1995: 33). With mobilized desire and continual transformations, an individual may become a “desiring nomad,” learning the genuine way of life and defeating the oppressions of centralized controls.

In light of Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology, travel can be divided into two kinds: “sedentary travel” and “nomadic travel.” A sedentary traveler

2 In “On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism,” Janet Wolff observes “the metaphor of travel” in relation to “ideology of travel” and finds the contemporary metaphors of travel are extremely gendered. Wolff agrees that “Gilles Deleuze’s notion of the ‘nomadic subject’ has been found to be a useful way to acknowledge the television viewer’s or the reader’s complex ability to engage with a text both from a position of identity and in an encounter which also potentially changes that identity” (119). However, Wolff claims that because “[her] knowledge of Deleuze’s work is mostly secondary” (130), she does not go a step further to look into the metaphor of travel with Deleuze’s concept of nomadic subject. In her article, it remains unresolved whether a nomadic subject’s metaphor of travel is able to subvert the gendered metaphor of travel in the contemporary time or not.
follows rigid lines, reinforces the boundary between the self and the other, and moves from the self to the self. In other words, a sedentary travel is an immovable movement where the self neither crosses the boundary nor encounters the other. By contrast, a nomadic traveler moves freely in a smooth space and looks for lines of flight. S/he crosses the boundary, encounters the other, engages in “becoming-other,” and returns home with differences (Islam 57).

In Orlando, boundary crossings can be perceived on the levels of space and gender.

Space

In The Ethics of Travel, Syed Manzurul Islam proposes that traversing threshold alone does not count as crossing boundary. While “traversing threshold” is “leaving one spatial marker and arriving at another,” “crossing boundary” goes a step further by enacting “the between that divides and joins spatial locations” (5). In the case of Orlando, s/he traverses the spatial threshold, goes through the process of negotiating “the between,” and returns to England to verify the “differences” that have happened in “the between.” Orlando can be said to make her/himself a traveler.

In Orlando, at the end of 17th century, Orlando meets Sasha the Russian princess in England. She attracts Orlando with her dynamic energy force and mysterious look, which in turn challenge his concept of gender identity. Orlando tries to define Sasha with language but fails. He invites Sasha to elope with him but is betrayed at the last moment. As Emmanuel Levinas notes, in such circumstances, the best way to regain a man’s dignity and power is to stay at home, the center of patriarchy. Home provides a sense of security for the self, ensuring the self’s ability of “totalizing” the other; home excludes the dangerous and the unfamiliar, protecting the self’s domination over a certain domain (37-38). However, Orlando, who has experienced loss of love and difficulties of poetry writing, “realiz[es] that his home is uninhabitable, and that steps must be taken to end the matter instantly...[Orlando] asked King Charles to send him as Ambassador Extraordinary to Constantinople” (113). For King Charles II, to appoint Orlando to a station abroad is to fulfill the
colonial mission. For Orlando, to go to Turkey is to search for a possible answer to the most urgent question of life.

With his good diplomacy and fluent Turkish, Orlando properly represents Charles II to communicate and negotiate with Turkish Sudan. But Orlando does not intend to propagate the superior British culture. He quickly discovers that to establish political and military forces is not congenial to him. Instead, he finds himself responding to local conventions, rather than being disposed to regulate it. Orlando renounces his English aristocratic upbringing, joins the local community and even marries a Spanish gypsy dancer (128). The gypsy qualities such as being defiant, unrestrained and outside history are exactly the opposites of the British lordship and the instrumental civilization inherited by Orlando.

At this point, Orlando’s boundary crossing is extended to a spiritual and social dimension in the foreign country. As Henri Lefebvre notes – space is continuously re-produced and re-constructed based on human activities (26) – Orlando’s spirit, thinking, behavior and social relations create a spiritual and social space. He escapes the English mores by getting involved with non-Europeans. His anti-traditional marriage to a gypsy dancer can be considered as a starting point of his departure from British tradition. His becoming-woman is the summit of such a departure, constructing a whole new spiritual space.

**Gender**

When the coups d’état breaks out in Turkey and Sudan is overthrown, Orlando’s “becoming a woman” occurs during a seven-day sleep. That Orlando’s sexual metamorphosis and the political revolution occur simultaneously is not meant to be a mere coincidence. As Karen Lawrence notes, it is Woolf’s satire on the “mapping of gender onto the colonial adventure”; both the “policing of the orient” and the “policing of sexuality” are disrupted by revolution (193-4). However, while Orlando’s tenure as ambassador is disrupted by the political revolution, his private sexual metamorphosis (“becoming a woman”) prepares him/her for the eventual “becoming-woman.”
Taking place in a foreign country, Orlando’s “becoming a woman” brings about some questions. Why does it, being a radical event in the novel, occur in a foreign country, not in England? Could the reason be that England is hostile to female desire and subjectivity, or female imagination and creativity cannot be nurtured in England but have to be sowed in a foreign country so as to bloom in England? To these questions, Lawrence suggests that Orlando’s “gender crossing” be imagined as “cultural border crossing” (182), which “enables a return to the scene of home in which home itself is transformed” by new paradigms of desire constructed on the journey (206).

Woolf, however, has not answered these questions in the novel, and the absence of answers actually highlights the significance of travel. As one of the motives of travel is the discontent with the status quo of the homeland, it follows that travel requires a search for an alternative in the foreign country. What is special about Orlando is that the alternative is a gender-transcending one: instead of political, military, economic, scientific or technical strategy, the alternative is a molecular mode that features multiplicities and breaks the binary opposition of male vs. female.

II. Travel: Lines of Movement

The movement from one “point” to another shapes a “line.” As Deleuze and Guattari indicate, we all have to take some line: “we are made of line” (1987: 194). By virtue of the internal lines, we travel along the external lines, paths and trajectories. In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari propose that human life is “spatially and socially segmented” (208) from which there are two distinct types of segmentarity: rigid and supple. While the rigid segmentarity brings binarism, the supple space is lineal. Beyond “rigid” and “supple” is the mode that is “one or several lines of flight” (222). These three lines are not mutually exclusive or independent of one another. Instead, they “do not only coexist, but transform themselves into one another, cross over into one another” (223). Observing on a grand scale, the present essay finds that Orlando’s life is composed of these three lines that inform her interactions with the world. To study Orlando’s life, therefore, is to study the lines and to
investigate how the boundary crossings shape and develop the movements of Orlando’s life.

A. Rigid Line

Also called the molar line, the rigid line consolidates and reterritorializes the existing relationship among individuals, religion, society and country by representing binary oppositions and differentiating the reality into subject and object. It is seen as the concentric State Apparatus, whose power absorbs the other to its own center and assimilates the difference to its own controlled territory.

At the beginning of the novel, young Orlando is on a rigid line which keeps him grounded in the enclosure of the familiar: “Orlando’s fathers had ridden in fields of asphodel, and stony fields, and fields watered by strange rivers, and they had struck many heads of many colours off many shoulders, and brought them back to hang from the rafters. So too would Orlando, he vowed” (13). What Orlando does every day is to practice “the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters” (13). Aiming at joining the expeditionary force of the Great Britain, he prepares himself to be a typical British man. He intentionally estranges himself from his mother, and is eager to participate in the patriarchal world: “But since he was sixteen only, and too young to ride with them in Africa or France, he would steal away from his mother and the peacocks in the garden and go to his attic room and there lunge and plunge and slice the air with his blade” (13).

Even though Orlando wields the sword, his movement is subject to the State Apparatus. It is a confined reaction lacking in speed and intensity, staying put without moving toward “the outside” to encounter “the other.” Besides, Orlando’s writing, adding to his rigid movement, is restricted to the existing system of signification. He replaces his self with “representation”: “He was fluent, evidently, but he was abstract. Vice, Crime, Misery were the personages of his drama; there were Kings and Queens of impossible territories; horrid plots confounded them; noble sentiments suffused them; there was never a word said as he himself would have said it” (16).
B. Supple Line

The supple line, or the molecular line, deterritorializes the world of representation and disrupts the rigid line (the molar lines). As Deleuze and Guattari explicate, the supple line is to be understood in its relation to the rigid line: “molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes, and parties” (1987: 216-7). On the other hand, supple lines break the limits set by rigid lines, thus “picking up speed” (25), composing a prelude of transformation heading beyond the boundaries, towards becomings, towards lines of flight.

Engaged in the following three acts of deterritorialization, Orlando moves on the supple line, whose speed haunts the rigid line of travel.

1. Criticizing the Tradition of Male Adventures: However much Orlando likes to “listen to sailors’ stories of hardship and horror and cruelty on the Spanish main” (28), he gets bored with the stories about male adventures and conquests – they are so dry and unimaginative: “he began to be a little weary of the repetition, for a nose can only be cut off in one way and maidenhood lost in another . . . whereas the arts and the sciences had a diversity about them which stirred his curiosity profoundly” (30). In traditional western travel writing, such a masculine writing tends to feminize the foreign territory as a virgin land which is to be conquered and domesticated. Expressing his discontent with the mode of male domination, Orlando criticizes the masculine tradition of travel writing while the novel Orlando provides an alternative.3

3In The Adventurer: The Fate of Adventure in the Western World, Paul Zweig analyzes the structure of male adventures in terms of the adventurer’s relationship with women. According to Zweig’s studies, for an adventure to take place, the male adventurer must leave his mother and will then encounter a young woman (68-80). At some point, Orlando is structured in the same way as the male Orlando leaves his mother and encounters Sasha. However, the subsequent events after Orlando’s separation from Sasha, including sex change, poetry writing and home-return, are the revisions and challenges to the traditional structure of male adventures.
2. Refusing an Absolute Gender Identity: As for gender identity, adult Orlando demonstrates the tendency of multiplicities, refusing to make a single absolute choice from the binary opposites. On first meeting Princess Sasha, Orlando is attracted to Sasha’s “androgyny.” When finding Sasha’s female identity, Orlando reacts in a complicated way: “She was a woman. Orlando stared; trembled; turned hot; turned cold; longed to hurl himself through the summer air; to crush acorns beneath his feet; to toss his arms with the beech trees and the oaks” (37). It is difficult for Orlando to accept any kind of gender fixity. Archduke Harry’s infatuation with Orlando also reinforces Orlando’s oscillation of gender identity. Extremely confused, Orlando describes love as “two faces”: “For Love, to which we may now return, has two faces; one white, the other black; two bodies; one smooth, the other hairy. . . indeed, of every member and each one is the exact opposite of the other. Yet, so strictly are they joined together that you cannot separate them” (112-13). When seeing Archduke Harry in an embarrassing female disguise, Love, the Bird of Paradise, shows itself “black, hairy, brutish” (113). When Love flies in wet feathers to his desk, Orlando feels disturbed and his poetry writing is interrupted.

3. Searching for an Innovative Expression: The reason why Orlando falls in love with Princess Sasha has much to do with his search for an innovative literary language and expression. After meeting Sasha, Orlando tries to describe her but thousands of figures of speech fail alike: Orlando “tr[ies] to tell her . . . what she was like. Snow, cream, marble, cherries, alabaster, golden wire? None of these. She was like a fox, or an olive tree . . . like nothing he had seen or known in England. Ransack the language as he might, words failed him.” On the other hand, Sasha, who comes from a foreign country, knows how to utilize language as a veil, revealing and concealing herself at the same time: “For in all she said, however open she seemed and voluptuous, there was something hidden; in all she did, however daring, there was something concealed. So the green flame seems hidden in the emerald, or the sun imprisoned in a hill. The clearness was only outward; within was a wandering flame.” Nevertheless, Sasha’s peculiar expression cannot find its way in English, which is “too frank, too candid, too honeyed a speech.” Orlando then figures out that he “want[s] another landscape, and another tongue” (45).
The nature of love and how to express love with figures of speech in poetry have always been the issues that Orlando is much concerned about. In a continual fashion he finds that the English tradition of literature he succeeds to is insufficient to provide proper language to accomplish his mission: “Every single thing, once he tried to dislodge it from its place in his mind, he found thus cumbered with other matter” (97). As “lines of writing conjugate with life lines” (Deleuze, 1987: 194), Orlando, whose life is experiencing the difficulty of love, can hardly finish writing the poem, “The Oak Tree, A Poem,” that he has worked on for years.

As Orlando cannot entirely break away from the system that he desires to escape from but is engaged in a process that is directed toward a course of “changes in values” and continual becomings, we see him move on the supple line. Taking the supple line means that one does not possess the territory, but rather the movement itself becomes the “molecular flow” that is able to “escape the binary organizations” (Deleuze, 1987: 216).

C. Lines of Flight

With much potential, the line of flight is the one that can evolve into creative metamorphoses of the assemblage and result in constant “mutation” that forms the ongoing force. As Deleuze makes it clear, to flee on the line does not mean to avoid commitments or make an exit from the world: “to flee is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than a flight” (2002: 36). The line of flight consolidates the force released by the individual, constructs mobility and multiplicities, moves with all directions, and leads the mutating individual into “becoming,” a continual production without termination. It is on the line of flight that the traveler takes the boundaries as “something to cross, to punch back, to go beyond” (37).

In the novel, Orlando’s lines of flight lead to “becoming-woman” and “stuttering.”

1. Becoming-woman: Through travelling and crossing the boundary, Orlando achieves “absolute deterritorialization”: “becoming-woman,” which is different from “becoming a woman.” While the former breaks the male-female
binary opposition, the latter is a molar identity enclosed within the binary opposition. The procedure of becoming-woman begins with destabilizing the molar identity. As Deleuze explains, a molar entity is “the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject” (1987: 275). Instead of representing or imitating the entity of the molar female figure, becoming-woman releases the physical molar bond imposed on an individual and relieves the individual’s speed, intensity and fluidity, thus generating a “molecular-woman.”

Based on a traditional molar identity, binary opposition of sex has made a tremendous impact on the individual’s body, experience and history. Becoming-woman deterritorializes existing hierarchy with molecular energies, breaking the form and relation of binary opposition. Deleuze thus views deterritorialization as the threshold for the lines of flight, the beginning of all becomings (1987: 275, 277). To deterritorialize the gender hierarchy of binary opposition, all men and women have to go through the procedure of “becoming-woman.” As a result, sexuality is “the production of a thousand sexes, which are so many uncontrollable becomings” (278). The ultimate goal of becoming-woman is neither to redefine the gender category nor to invent a new identity, but to destroy the existing gender category, having identity break

---

4 Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of “becoming-woman” has provoked many discussions, most of which are concerned about “difference”; do individuals with different genders, sexualities, ethnicities and subjectivities all end up with disappearing in the concept of undifferentiated multiplicities? If men as well as women have to undergo “becoming-woman,” there will be no firm demarcation between proper male and female, and the spirit of “the personal is the political” which is based on difference will be undermined. Some feminists, on the other hand, identify with “becoming-woman” as it brings about energy and dynamics. In Deleuze and Feminist Theory, Claire Colebrook endorses the theory as follows: “This might provide the way of thinking new modes of becoming—not as the becoming some subject, but a becoming towards others, a becoming towards difference, and a becoming through new questions” (12). Indeed, “becoming-woman” is a theory of “multiplicities” developed by Deleuze and Guattari to solve the predicament of binary oppositions. As Brian Massumi points out: “Deleuze and Guattari do not deny the reality of sexual difference. They simply argue that it does not lie at the foundation of subjectivity. In their view, the binary couple Man/Woman is one of the interlocking sets of coordinates on the categorical grid defining the person” (86).
through collective “sameness” and achieve individual “singularity.” According to Deleuze and Guattari, the goal of gender politics is to destroy the ossified gender hierarchy under patriarchy, to “ungender” everyone and to create a “non-molar” social territory (Massumi, 88-9). In this way, “becoming-woman” can be said to prophesy a new society, in which “the father function that construed as the need to conform to an established model (Man)” is to be destroyed (ibid). As Buchanan sums up, “becoming-woman” is “a solution to the unbearable fact that we become our parents because they own us” (96).

Prior to his becoming-woman in England, Orlando becomes a woman in Turkey. As Patricia Pisters notes, “Orlando first has to change sex to understand what it means when your body is stolen from you (‘You are mine!’)” (125). From the moment of coming back to England in the mid-18th century, Orlando encounters all those prejudices and oppressions the society imposes on women, which she had never sensed when he was a man (150-2). Back to England, Orlando remains to be the same individual, but social hierarchy accompanies her change of sex; her new sexual identity becomes a pressing case for the English court, and Orlando as a woman loses her estate.

Orlando’s relation with poetic inheritance has also changed. She sees that to pursue a writing career is antithetical to the proper codes of women’s conduct. The Victorian ideology of the “angel in the house” demands that the society should not expect or encourage a woman to work on serious writing, such as Joseph Addison’s The Spectator and Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels. What the society allows a woman to do is to engage in trivial mental activities: “Surely, since she is a woman, and a beautiful woman, and a woman in the prime of life, she will soon give over this pretense of writing and thinking and begin at least to think of a gamekeeper . . . And then she will write him a little note (and as long as she writes little notes, nobody objects to a woman writing either)” (256). With strategies of parody hidden in the system, Orlando then criticizes, decodes and deterritorializes the existing literary tradition (190-209). While Orlando leaves England to search for inspirations for poetry writing, she returns to England to create an alternative mode of expression for the literary tradition of England. The difference between the two situations lies in the fact that Orlando returns home as a woman, confronting the discord between a female poet and the patriarchal tradition of English literature.
One day in the 19th century, when walking in the garden, Orlando quickens her pace and runs. She runs as if she were fleeing, running towards the world of becoming. At this moment, Orlando encounters Shelmerdine. Her “self-same other” relationship with Shelmerdine climaxes at the point when they recognize the presence of the opposite sex in the other:

“You’re a woman, Shel!” she cried.
“You’re a man, Orlando!” he cried.” (240)

For both of Orlando and Shelmerdine, “encountering each other” signifies the liberation of desire and elimination of fixed gender mode. However, the metaphor of androgyny does not refer to the unity of male and female, but a vacillation. As Orlando’s biographer points out, “In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place” (181). Similar to travel, vacillation means changes, boundary crossings, and defiance of stagnation. Just like the book title of Orlando, Orlando’s vacillation does not occur within the hierarchical binary opposition of “either . . . or . . .”, but creates new possibilities and multiplicities by replacing the “l” in “Orlando” with a slash and transforming it to “Or/ando”: “or/and (and/or) and/or” (Bowlby, 50). Undergoing the intensive moments of his/her life, Orlando transcends the conditional historicity of “the actual,” and moves towards the becoming of “the virtual.” As Deleuze notes, it is the opposite of the imaginary: “there is no being beyond becoming, nothing beyond multiplicity; neither multiplicity nor becoming are appearances or illusions” (1983: 23-24). At a moment like this, Orlando experiences the process of “becoming-woman.”

5 Patricia Pisters agrees that Orlando’s “becoming-woman” occurs at this moment, though she does not develop her observation in greater details (125-26). Still most regrettably, many critics regard Orlando’s “sexual metamorphosis” or “becoming a woman” as “becoming-woman.” The novel provides a contrary perspective: “…Orlando woke. 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” (132). It’s quite obvious that Orlando’s “complete nakedness” manifests her biological sex as a woman, yet “becoming-woman” is “non-representational” (Sotirin 102). As Deleuze and Guattari propose, “the lines [of flight] are ‘inscribed on a Body without Organs’”
Orlando’s becoming-woman frees her from the binarism of gender identity. She thereby has more potentials for transformation and searches for constant becomings. For Orlando, writing is her lifelong desire, the inevitable future. Becoming-woman with high self-awareness and abundant creative energy, Orlando finishes and publishes “The Oak Tree: A Poem” which could be done when Orlando was a man. Becoming-woman and the change it comes with are certainly the turning points in Orlando’s life, as she looks back into her life:

Yet still, for all her travels and adventures and profound thinkings and turnings this way and that, she was only in process of fabrication. What the future might bring, Heaven only knew. Change was incessant, and change perhaps would never cease. High battlements of thought, habits that had seemed durable as stone, went down like shadows at the touch of another mind and left a naked sky and fresh stars twinkling in it. (168)

Indeed, Orlando’s three-hundred-year lifespan has been transformed from his identification with the authorial patriarchy to the one with mature molecular cognition. At the end of the novel, Orlando rejoices with ease and is immersed in sublimity: “‘Ecstasy!’ she cried, ‘ecstasy!’” (312).

2. **Stuttering:** According to Deleuze, becoming-woman is a “procedure.” There are many ways for a procedure to be transformed into a device, but Deleuze is most emphatic on “stuttering.”

For Deleuze, stuttering does not refer to the stammering of the tongue, but the stuttering of the language itself, i.e., the breakage and difficulty in communications. He explains: “when the stuttering no longer affects preexisting words, but itself introduces the words it affects; these words no longer exist independently of the stutter, which selects and links them together through itself” (1997: 107). In other words, stuttering is a “mode of composition, as well as an effect” (Buchanan, 100). The effect of stuttering

(1987: 203). In other words, the body does not imitate or represent the existing shape, and the organ does not provide the existing functions. On the line of flight, one moves freely in every direction, undergoing continual “becoming.”
generates a “minor” function of language: “Language is made to ‘stutter’ when its molar function of representing order takes on a halting, stuttering characteristic, thereby opening up on to a realm that has remained unbound by societal structuring (and molar language)” (Albrecht-Crane, 125). This realm releases non-mainstream meanings from the very repressed bottom, forming “agrammatical formula” (Deleuze, 1997: 68) and thereby challenging the mainstream conventions.

When trying to write in England, Orlando notices that the English literary tradition falls short of something so that his words cannot fully convey the meanings. The deficiency of “something” in English becomes clear when one compares English with the other language. Involved with Sasha, Orlando finds that the Russian people’s sentences “often left unfinished from doubt as to how best to end them” (44-5). In the case of Sasha, Orlando finds that she, though remaining quiet most of the time, “talked so enchantingly, so wittily, so wisely”: “For in all she said, however open she seemed and voluptuous, there was something hidden; in all she did, however daring, there was something concealed.” By contrast, “English was too frank, too candid, too honeyed a speech,” and Orlando “ransack the language as he might, words failed him” (45). In front of Sasha, the Russian other, Orlando stutters (45-52) and accordingly “want[s] another landscape, and another tongue” (45).

Orlando is not the only one that stutters; the English language does as well. After resigning from the office of the Turkish ambassador, Orlando starts roving around with the gypsy. In front of the gypsy other, he stutters again: “… when they were all sitting round the camp fire and the sunset was blazing over the Thessalian hills, Orlando exclaimed: ‘How good to eat!’” (137), breaking the convention of saying “How beautiful it is!” In doing so, Orlando deterritorializes the absolute value and function of the mainstream language.

At the same time, the gypsy notices that Orlando gets quieter: she hesitates for a long time before answering others’ questions (140). Her stuttering, silence and hesitation altogether give shape to a new resistance – of thinking and expressing. Orlando reasons that since “the most ordinary conversation is often the most poetic, and the most poetic is precisely that which cannot be written down,” the modern spirit, therefore, can “dispense with language.” And to practice what s/he reasons, Orlando invites the reader
to endorse this new way of expression: “we leave a great blank here, which must be taken to indicate that the space is filled to repletion” (242).

After returning to England and encountering Shelmerdine, Orlando creates and uses a foreign language to communicate. While creating and preserving the very few functions of language, they have no difficulty understanding each other: “he having told her that the supply of biscuits now gave out, he was surprised and delighted to find how well she had taken his meaning” (246). Most appropriately, it is through creating this new language that they find the vacillation and nonfixity of gender: “Are you positive you aren’t a man?” he would ask anxiously, and she would echo, ‘Can it be possible you’re not a woman?’” (246). The stuttering of the existing language, the creation of a new language, together with the vacillation of gender identity, add up to resist fixed social organizations and imagine a different future with experimentations that lead to intensifying life. As such, one sees that Orlando’s becomings are not the one from one language to another, or from one identity to another, but those of intensity and “multiplicities” composed of heterogeneous “singularities.” At this point, Deleuze comments that “Orlando already does not operate by memories, but by blocks, blocks of ages, block of epochs, blocks of the kingdoms of nature, blocks of sexes, forming so many becomings between things, or so many lines of deterritorialization” (1987: 294).

III. Travel: Orlando Returns Home

After the coups d’état in Turkey, Orlando, who is “becoming a woman,” resigns from the office of the British ambassador and leaves Constantinople with some gypsy friends to lead a nomad life. At first the gypsies accept Orlando, willingly helping her integrate into the community. They teach her to steal, weave baskets, make cheese and set up bird traps. They even consider marrying her to a gypsy man. In a word, they try to “totalize” Orlando. However, even though Orlando is much eager to rush about freely on the Turkish plain, she cannot abandon the (British) cultural vehicle of imagination because “Orlando had contracted in England some of the customs or diseases.”
. . which cannot, it seems, be expelled” (137). Orlando’s “diseases,” in short, is the love for nature and poetry.

For Orlando, nature is the God she believes in. The essence of nature is closely related to love, truth, beauty and poetry: they are neither self-evident nor self-manifest, but have to be represented via imagination and figuration. When Orlando is immersed in nature, “she liken[s] the hills to ramparts, to the breasts of doves, and the flanks of kine. She compare[s] the flowers to enamel and the turf to Turkey rugs worn thin. Trees were withered hags, and sheep were grey boulders.” When Orlando writes and enjoys nature, she realizes that “[e]verything, in fact, was something else” (138). Everything relies on the other as a “mediation” to form a figuration and manifest itself. The “figuration” that Orlando relies on is also applicable to her poetry because the truth of poetry is as mysterious and ambiguous as nature. Being a severe god, the truth of poetry hides its message underneath language and thoughts, making it difficult to look through.

Still for the gypsy, there is no difference between essence and surface, i.e., the surface of a thing is the essence of it. Everything is the thing itself, nothing else. All kinds of figuration such as metaphors, similes and metonymies cause tension in human relationship and turbulence in society. But how can poetry that Orlando loves exist without figurations? Whenever Orlando has difficulty communicating with the gypsy via speech, she begins missing pen, paper and ink: “‘Oh! If only I could write!’ she cried” (140). However, the gypsy world is one without permanence of place, history, and literary tradition. With the background of a written civilization, Orlando starts wondering: “there was some difference between her and the gypsies which made her hesitate sometimes to marry and settle down among them forever” (141).

Realizing that there is something missing from the rootless gypsy life, Orlando decides to go home. After all, it is English literature that nourishes her concept of poetry; it is in England that Orlando must record his/her travel experience. In fact, even in a foreign country far away from the homeland, what Orlando stays close to is his/her beloved poetry and English culture. On the journey of flying imaginations she never leaves the home behind. Without home to be posited as a fixed point of reference, there will be neither departure nor return, and the concept of travel will not be possibly established. No
matter how obscurely or symbolically the return is presented, home as a fixed point of reference is the key to every travel.

Orlando’s returning home does not disqualify her as a traveler. As Deleuze elaborates, “the nomad is not necessarily the one who moves: some voyages take place in situ, are trips in intensity. Even historically, nomads are not necessarily those who move about like migrant. On the contrary, they do not move; nomads, they nevertheless stay in the same place and continually evade the codes of settled people” (1985: 149). A nomad has not necessarily to be the one who moves. A nomad can stay where s/he is, as they act freely, constantly escaping the “coding” of the State Apparatus.

After returning to England, the problem Orlando faces is the controversy over her sex. By the end of 19th century, people still argue about her sex. When the court announces that Orlando’s sex is indisputably female, the whole of London rejoices at the result of the lawsuit. In the market-place, dozens of Turkish women and peasant boys with the label “I am a base Pretender” (244) were burnt in effigy. The English people cannot tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity of sex; they try to totalize Orlando. At a moment like this, what Orlando chooses to do is to take a walk with Shelmerdine in the woods. When the wind blows, Shelmerdine mounts on a horse and heads to Cape Horn to take a sail. While the London people fail to totalize Orlando, she does not even try to totalize Shelmerdine. Both Orlando and Shelmerdine move freely and encounter the other on the line of flight. As Deleuze explains, “encountering the other” is not meeting or associating with the other, but respecting the other, establishing an “intersubjective” relationship with each other, and thereby “becoming-other”/ “becoming-woman” (2002: 6-7).

The seed of Orlando’s “becoming-woman” is planted in Turkey and blooms in England. Encountering Shelmerdine, Orlando’s “becoming-woman” bears its fruit. When Shelmerdine first introduces himself as “Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine,” Orlando answers immediately “I knew it!” (239). Shelmerdine is for Orlando what she has always already known, as she is for him. Their relationship, figured by travel, is as good as double. Shelmerdine, who falls in love with Orlando and marries her, is unmistakably a total traveler. He takes adventures, sails with the wind, and roves around the sea and the land: “. . . his life was spent in the most desperate and splendid of adventures – which is to voyage round Cape Horn in the teeth of a gale”
(241). As for Orlando, Shelmerdine comprehends her name in a “metaphor of travel.” When they first meet, Shelmerdine intuitively calls her “Orlando.” He explains, “For if you see a ship in full sail coming with the sun on it proudly sweeping across the Mediterranean from the South Seas, one says at once, ‘Orlando’” (239).

Indeed, in this imaginative piece of work that transcends space, history and gender, hasn’t Woolf called out: “Orlando my love, your name is travel!”?

IV. Epilogue

In “The Spectacle of Travel,” Paulo Prato and Gianluca Trivero argue that one of the essences of modernity is “mobility”: “In recent decades, mobility has exploded to the point of characterizing everyday life much more than the traditional image of the ‘home and family’. Transport ceases to function as a metaphor of progress or at least of ‘modern’ life, and becomes instead the primary activity of existence” (40). In a similar vein, James Clifford argues, in Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century, that human location is constituted by displacement as much as by stasis, and that “travels” are the crucial sites for an “unfinished modernity” (2) in contemporary globalization. Seen in this light, Orlando’s becomings may prompt us to think anew about change/mobility and be exposed to affects in unpredictable ways. Accordingly, the novel Orlando: A Biography may be said to have already pointed out “the routes” for us.

Or, to put it in another way, it is not that Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology verifies Woolf’s Orlando, but that Woolf had written about movement, travel and boundary crossings based on the concept of becoming much before Deleuze and Guattari developed their nomadology. Woolf is one of the writers whom they deeply admire. They do so mainly because they see that Woolf’s work proceeds an infinite productivity of becomings: “The only way to get out of dualisms, be-between, pass between, intermezzo, is what Virginia Woolf lived out with all her strength, in all her work, never ceasing to become” (1987: 277). True, in Orlando: A Biography, Orlando crosses multiple boundaries, engages in the procedure of becomings, transforms to a desiring nomad, and hence becomes a metaphor of travel.
References


