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FEMININE POWER THROUGH THE PERFORMANCE OF GENDER AND IDENTITY: SUBVERTING PATRIARCHAL STANDARDS AND THE GENDER BINARY

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Subverting Patriarchal Standards and the Gender Binary

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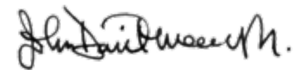

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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This thesis examines strategies for exercising feminine power within patriarchal settings; in particular, it addresses the ways in which female characters access varied forms of power through gendered performances that problematize or transgress the gender binary constructed and enforced within patriarchal societies. The thesis focuses on three literary works, *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller, *Fantomina* by Eliza Haywood, and *Orlando: A Biography* by Virginia Woolf, in which the central character, through performances that expand or subvert assigned gender roles, struggles to gain and use traditionally masculine forms of power within the context of patriarchal societies. These characters' efforts to maintain power highlight the fact that women are unable to access power except through gender-performative actions, whether by exaggerating their femininity or by emasculating themselves through their actions or ideals.

This thesis applies a variety of critical techniques drawn from the fields of feminist and queer theory and cultural studies to account for the ways in which women obtain masculine power through gender-performative actions in a variety of time settings and in their varied relationships with male characters. In *The Song of Achilles*, Thetis is unable to obtain any lasting hold on power because she uses her son, Achilles, as a point of access. After Achilles' death, she loses her desire to obtain and wield power in a patriarchal and mortal society. Briseis, the minor

female character who mirrors Thetis, loses her position of value within the male community when Patroclus dies, leaving her unprotected, and she chooses to immerse herself with Thetis, a sea nymph, in the primal embrace of Thalassa, the feminine aspect of the sea, rather than to remain in the perilous mortal community where she is valued only in terms of her transactional value among men.

The original intention of *Fantomina*'s protagonist in assuming different personae quickly morphs from innocent curiosity into a desire to excite and retain the attention and love of Beauplaisir. By setting a male-oriented goal, the character "Fantomina" commits herself to playing roles scripted by patriarchal values, and this sets her up for failure stemming from a form of internalized oppression. As Marilyn Frye observes about men, "In their relations with women, what passes for respect is kindness, generosity, or paternalism; what passes for honor is removal to the pedestal. From women they want devotion, service, and sex" (135). "Fantomina" narrows her opportunities by performing only in female roles, because the only people whom men truly respect are other men. She therefore loses Beauplaisir, she is unable to keep her daughter, and she has her freedom stripped from her by being exiled to a French convent.

In juxtaposition to the dire ends of these female characters, *Orlando* opens new avenues through its protagonist, the gender-fluid Orlando (they, them, their). Beginning from a male perspective and shifting to a female position, with androgynous moments in between, Orlando creates a space outside of the patriarchally enforced gender binary and its corresponding expectations. As an outlier to these standards and to English society, Orlando is able to obtain a power that is truly their own rather than an authority bestowed by or borrowed from men. Thus, when the novel ends in 1928 as women gain political suffrage in England, Orlando chooses to put motherhood aside and expresses hope for further progress for women in the future.

The review and analysis of these literary works demonstrates that women are unable to gain any advantage, in power or otherwise, while operating within or on the basis of a male-oriented set of standards. Patriarchal points of access provide no opportunity to acquire or exert feminine power. Women will remain inferior in a system made by and for men as long as they are fully immersed in the constructs of a gender binary. Only by breaking from set categories, as Orlando does through androgynous presentation and gender-fluid behaviors that are informed by an awareness of traditional male and female perspectives can women make genuine progress in acquiring and wielding a power that is not built upon the oppression and segregation of women. The connection among these literary texts, beyond their focus of female characters reaching for power, is the authors' female perspective on the characters and their experiences. Because these works were written by women, the reader is forced to view, experience, and sympathize with each character from the perspective of a female authorial gaze that propounds a different set of ideal attributes and expectations for female characters from those typically imposed by an objectifying male perspective. Under the female gaze, the feminine characters become more accessible to the audience, allowing readers to understand the characters' actual motives and desires: to obtain power by having their voices heard and by achieving agency.

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Introduction

Issues of feminine power hover around the edges of every story in Western literature, in large part because Western societies function as patriarchies in which women are categorized and assigned value based on their ability to aid men through their roles as wives, mothers, daughters, and possessions. Feminine power is expressed through varied gendered identity performances, which are inflected by socio-economic class and which shape the many roles that women are expected to play throughout their life. A connecting factor among these varied roles is the way they define women in relationship to others, particularly men. One means women use to escape from the pressures and limitations of these expected roles is to disguise their identity through varying forms of femininity. Performing different identities allows female characters to explore and inhabit roles that their culture regards as outside their social class or as masculine and to exercise patriarchal forms of power that open up access to societal opportunities that are otherwise denied to them. Female characters' awareness of social expectations and their ability to understand and exploit gendered power dynamics support these characters' struggle for autonomy and authority.

This thesis examines three literary texts—*The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller, *Fantomina* by Eliza Haywood, and *Orlando: A Biography* by Virginia Woolf—that explore strategies for exerting feminine power across a wide timeline of Western literature. *The Song of Achilles*, although published in 2011, is set in Greece during the Heroic Age, a time when women owned only their inner thoughts and had limited or no access to agency or bodily autonomy. The standards of life for women during the Greek Heroic Age denied women a voice or legal rights, as can be seen in the ancient Greek law that permitted abortion, "merely ensuring that the father's right were upheld," and stipulating that "an expectant mother could not undergo

an abortion without first securing her husband's consent" (Garland 41). Even in marriage, where she played the dual roles of wife and mother, a woman was subject to the whims of her husband regarding her body. During this period, women were treated as possessions of their fathers or husbands, but the characters Thetis and Briseis problematize expectations of women's submissiveness. Thetis obtains more respect because of her link to divinity as a sea-nymph, incarnating and channeling the powers of the sea, which lies beyond male—or human—power or understanding. Greek men respect her for her divine powers, which exceed their mortal ones, because she is more than a lowly human woman. Briseis, in turn, provides a human mirror to Thetis's divinity as a Trojan woman held captive in the Greek camps. Not regarded even as a human, Briseis is labelled a "war-prize," an object to be awarded to the most valiant, notable soldier (Miller 226). Briseis' sole purpose in the novel is to act as a plot catalyst as the men fight over her like a valued possession. The contrast between these two female characters shows how the power that Thetis holds but that Briseis lacks arises from Thetis's ability continuously to shift roles and forms, thereby escaping the net of gendered expectations—and limitations—that confine mortal women. Thetis has the ability to assume multiple forms of femininity through the novel depending on her relationship to the person with whom she is interacting. As mother, goddess, wife, daughter, and divine spirit, she has access to many personae, whereas Briseis is confined to a single, externally assigned persona. Thetis' ability to occupy multiple different roles within the plot of Miller's novel and to move freely among these roles links her to Haywood's "Fantomina" and Woolf's Orlando.

Fantomina, published in 1725, jumps forward in time to the early eighteenth century, when masquerades were a popular form of entertainment and avenue for socializing. These masquerades provided a space to blur "historic lines of rank and privilege," with approximately

1,000 to 2,000 visitors being weekly attendees during the 1720s and 1730s (Azfar 154-155). With masquerades providing an outlet for disguises and normalizing social performances, "Fantomina"'s creation of personae emerges as a viable avenue for free expression, especially when constraints on women were tied to their social status, which was largely determined by a reputation reflective of their socio-economic status and familial relations. The character "Fantomina," throughout her pursuit of Beauplaisir, performs many widely varying feminine roles to conceal her assigned identity as a supposedly virginal heiress while exploring a variety of other social and sexual roles. "Fantomina" is in fact a daughter, lover, performer, socialite, and eventually a mother, but her greatest power comes through the performance of other feminine social roles. Because societal expectations, economic standing, and reputation were of the upmost importance during the eighteenth century, "Fantomina" actively hides her true identity because her assigned social position as a noblewoman severely limits her options for self-expression; to escape these constraints, she disguises herself using the power that comes from the free time and wealth afforded her as a noblewoman, as "Fantomina," from the reader as well as from the other characters within the novel in order to exercise power and autonomy by acquiring knowledge through a series of performances or "masks."

Unlike Thetis, whose divinity allows her to transcend expectations of women, "Fantomina" utilizes her assumed personae to seduce Beauplaisir and to enjoy the social freedom and mobility accorded to men, while exploring a variety of social roles. Using the power she gains in disguise to appeal to a man, however, leaves her ensnared in the patriarchal system created and enforced by eighteenth-century English society, even as she seems to turn the tables against Beauplaisir through manipulation. While her initial intentions stem from an innocent curiosity and desire, she exercises a degree of control and power through her manipulative

tactics, while simultaneously undermining her own efforts to obtain and maintain power by seeking continually to achieve value in the eyes of a man. “Fantomina” has the vision to disguise herself and exercise power through deception, but she never considers the disguise that could grant her access to the highest degree of power and social mobility at the time, that of a man. Even while protecting her societal reputation through the use of personae, she never attempts to hide her gender identity as a woman. Holding onto the gendered aspect of her identity, she never fully challenges the patriarchal system, and her limited choice of disguises unwittingly reinforces the restrictions she seeks to evade. Her role-playing acknowledges the patriarchy and plays by its rules, which leave her unable to wield power in any consistent or secure way.

Because “Fantomina” acquiesces to patriarchal models of gender by enacting only feminine roles, her power is easily taken away by Beauplaisir and her mother. Beauplaisir shatters the illusion that her disguises gave her any power beyond a temporary ability to act outside of the constraints of societal expectations and accountability. Her mother removes any sense of agency “Fantomina” has managed to build through her personae by taking away her newborn daughter and forcibly removing her from England. “Fantomina” ends up leaving the country with less power than she initially had; however, she goes to reside in a French convent, a space filled with feminine energy and free from men and their controlling male gaze; this exile holds out the promise of a new form of feminine power that “Fantomina” may cultivate. In a sense, her final performance will be as a nun, but the novella is unable to follow her into the convent because the genre and language do not have the resources or ability to describe a setting and plot that cannot be directly observed by the male gaze. There is no way accurately to describe a female-only environment like that of a convent in male-centered language; thus, the reader is left to fantasize about an unviewable and untouchable form of “Fantomina,” a character

whose actual identity will also forever be closed off to the actual male gaze but that remains entirely too exposed to the imaginative space of the sexualizing male imagination in the eighteenth century and beyond.

Orlando, published in 1928, actually begins before *Fantomina*, in the late sixteenth century, and ends in the early twentieth century. Across the novel's wide timeline, the treatment of women differs in accordance with contingent social norms. As a place marker to show the treatment of women, the reign of England's Queen Elizabeth I aligns with the beginning of *Orlando*. Known as the "Virgin Queen" from the lack of masculine presence in her life—being fatherless, lacking surviving male siblings, without a romantic partner, and having no offspring—Elizabeth I ruled without a male counterpart for the entirety of her reign and, as a result, played both masculine and feminine roles for the people of England. She was able to maintain this balance between gendered roles as a woman and a symbolically male "sovereign" in part through her rhetorical abilities. In her famous "Speech to the Troops at Tilbury," she states, "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too" (597). Rather than hide in her palace and let her people make less than favorable judgments about her abilities to lead and protect the realm, she acknowledges her physical disadvantage as a woman during a time of war; at the same time, she encourages her people by projecting the image of both man and woman. By implying that she has the capability to fulfill both roles, she problematizes expectations associated with traditional gender roles in ways that anticipate and authorize Orlando's fluid experience and performance of gender.

In contrast to the finite timeline of *The Song of Achilles* and *Fantomina*, *Orlando: A Biography* breaks the mold by beginning during Elizabeth I's reign, during the late 1500s, and

extending until the Modernist period, in the 1920s. Orlando's success in achieving autonomy and power, in comparison to the divine Thetis and poorly disguised "Fantomina," stems from their[1] physical transcendence of a gender binary as they move from a static male identity to a fluidly feminine one, much as Elizabeth I managed to inhabit both male and female roles as King *and* Queen. Orlando begins their life in sixteenth-century England as a boy and shifts into a female form while serving as an English ambassador of King Charles II in Constantinople, which marks this gender switch as occurring between 1660 and 1685. As seen in *Fantomina*, women did not have much access to power beyond the reputation afforded them based on the perceived "propriety" of their conduct. Orlando transitions while in Turkey, where the dress codes follow an androgynous style, allowing for a variety of social and personal metamorphoses. At the same time, the unisex style of Turkish clothing limits the more flamboyant possibilities for Orlando's gender expression, since "the liberatory potential of Turkish dress, dress which 'though entirely feminine, is also virtually identical to the items worn by men,'" narrowed the possibilities for performative gender to a one-dimensional image (Winch 55). To access the full potential of their femininity, Orlando requires the options presented by familiarly gendered English clothing.

When Orlando returns to England in their female form, they slide between presenting as a man and as a woman depending on their mood or situation; by the mid-1800s, they begin to gain more respect in both gendered identity performances through their connections with well-known literary figures. It is no coincidence that these events occur during the time when the women's suffrage movement was beginning to gain momentum in the United Kingdom. The novel ends in 1928, which was also the year in which British women gained the right to vote on equal terms

[1] As a gender-fluid character, Orlando transitions from male to female and uses a mix of masculine and feminine pronouns. Rather than choose strictly masculine or feminine pronouns, using they/them/theirs more accurately represents their gender nonconforming identity and provides for consistency when discussing Orlando.

with men, an intentional correspondence of dates. Orlando's journey—to obtain power and respect in their differently gendered and nongendered forms—ends at a time when one political form of equality between the sexes was achieved, even though other legal, social, and financial impediments to full equality remained in place. Orlando's existence as a gender-fluid character calls into question the structural validity of the binary gender and patriarchal expectations enforced by society. Unlike Thetis and "Fantomina," who struggle to reach past patriarchal standards but are ultimately unable to achieve any true power because they remain fully immersed in the system while trying to move beyond it, Orlando, by existing in interchangeable and intentional masculine or feminine forms, embodies and maintains a truly feminine power that they are able to access in transcending limitations that society tries to enforce.

Orlando's ability to inhabit forms outside the feminine sphere opens up a potential for power that extends through but also beyond the patriarchal system. As a nobleman, ambassador, lover, noblewoman, and mother, Orlando breaks down gendered expectations of femininity by being gender-fluid in all aspects of their identity. Even in the stereotypically feminine role of mother, they separate the baby from their person as if drawing a line between two distinct individuals and do not acknowledge the expected bond between mother and child. This unconventional fluidity of identity—including gender identity—makes possible Orlando's ascension to a viably permanent power unavailable either to the divinely stagnant Thetis or to the patriarchally constrained "Fantomina."

The most interesting aspects of the feminine characters in each of these novels are the strategies they use to seek empowerment. Thetis holds the position of creator[2] rather than

[2] Compared to powerful male divinities such as Zeus, the king of all gods, or Poseidon, whose name translates to "husband/lord of the earth," Thetis holds less divine power, which reflects her lower position in the divine hierarchy as sea-nymph; however, she creates her power instead of taking or acquiring it from others by being Achilles' mother, a source of power inaccessible to male divinities.

protagonist. *The Song of Achilles* is told from the viewpoint of the narrator, Patroclus, and it centers around his life with and love for Achilles. Thetis, as the mother of Achilles, becomes the source of life for the entire plot of the story, and this adds a layer of power due to her divine nature and her simultaneous ability to be the mother of a mortal hero. Even though the plot centers around Achilles, Thetis remains an important element of his life and of his decision-making process. Her ability to orchestrate her son's actions, which turns her son into a tool for her own purposes, is however a reflection of her specifically divine character. The reason her access to power is finite, although she is a goddess, is because her motherhood of Achilles stems from the unwanted actions of men. Peleus, Achilles' father, forced Thetis into the role of a mother. With her agency stolen from her, the best she can hope for is to create power through a situation over which she had no control. In this sense, her role in Achilles' life is an effort to recover her agency rather than an attempt at motherhood. After being physically violated, she continues the cycle of violation by weaponizing the limited power that being a woman, even a divine woman, affords her. In the end, Thetis cannot maintain power in the role of a mother; her only option is to wait for Achilles' eventual death and reclaim the control of her life as a divine being, which she forfeited by becoming a mother to a mortal man.

"Fantomina" attempts to extort power from a patriarchal system from a position within the system, by enacting a series of patriarchally defined female roles, and from the beginning this dooms her attempt to obtain access to a consistent source of power. Her actions impose further limitations by making Beauplaisir's continuing passion the sole objective of her performances when she is, in fact. unable to sustain his loyalty toward her. Starting from a place of deception, she is unable to build a stable relationship characterized by equitable power relations. As a result, her femininity is degraded and her power is taken away by Beauplaisir; by the newborn daughter,

whom she is not permitted to keep; and by her mother, who sends her away regardless of her wishes.

Compared to Thetis and "Fantomina," Orlando is the only character who will continue beyond the novel with any sort of sustained feminine power. Viewing societal standards from both female and male perspectives, Orlando acquires an insight that Thetis and "Fantomina" lack. Thetis ends in the grief of her son dying and losing one of her feminine roles as mother, and "Fantomina" has all agency and voice stripped from her as she loses traditional love, family, and future as she is confined to a French convent, whereas Orlando has a son by choice and continues into their bright future in 1928 with a clearly feminine identity position as women gain a degree of political equality by winning the right to vote in England. No dark cloud hangs over Orlando, as they are able confidently to stride into whatever future and role they desire, whether that be mother, wife, or autonomous single woman; the potential for Orlando is endless as they have a full power over who they choose to be.

Chapter 1

Women and Creation: Thetis as the Divine Origin of Power in *The Song of Achilles*

The plot of Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* is largely male-oriented; however, the plot's catalysts are the two female characters, Thetis and Briseis. These characters seem, superficially, to be quite different as one is an immortal goddess who is central to the plot, and the other is a mortal woman who has a smaller position as a plot catalyst, but they have in common their relationship, as mother or war-prize, to Achilles, who represents, albeit in ways that are at times ambiguous or actually subversive, an exaggerated stereotype of ideal—or excessive—masculinity. Both characters also have strong ties to the omnipresent sea. These two characters' association with the sea confirms that they may be more alike than appears at first glance and establishes a mutual interest that transcends the differences between mortal and immortal women. In this sense, Thetis and Briseis function as feminine personifications and secondary agents of a feminine primordial power, Thalassa, the living "body" of the sea.

In regard to the heteronormative expectations that plague traditional masculinity, Miller's text embodies a paradigmatic Western tradition through Achilles, and it illustrates the widespread perception and treatment of women such as Briseis and Thetis as trophies and as objects—or victims—of male desire. Only when they break with these heteronormative conventions are female characters able to access a uniquely feminine form of power. Adrienne Rich, for example, characterizes compulsive heterosexuality as a pervasive and unquestioned view that, "women, and women only, are responsible for child care in the sexual division of labor," which "has led to an entire social organization of gender inequality"; in order to combat this inequality, Rich argues, "men as well as women must become primary carers for children"

(462). This idea is exemplified in *The Song of Achilles* as Achilles is physically raised on land by his mortal father, Peleus, but displays ideas and thought processes similar to his mother's when visiting her by the seashore.

Despite the centrality of the male narrator, Patroclus, the events of *The Song of Achilles* could not occur without the action of the strongest female character, Thetis. As Achilles' mother, she is the creator of the protagonist, and her rape by Peleus is the starting point for the story's events. As Nancy J. Chodorow argues, Thetis' role as a mother is her source of power, and the power that mothers exert is a common trope in classical Greek stories as sons must reject their mother and her femininity in order to fully realize their masculine power; however, Thetis's divinity, which is linked to the sea, provides her with another source of power outside of the patriarchal and heteronormative domestic economy of the *oikos*. Thetis' epiphanies are more frequent and her power greater in proximity to the sea, evoking memories of Thalassa and ancient traditions of the sea, "thalassa," as a site and source of primordial feminine energy and authority. Achilles is special, compared to mortal men and gods, because of the divine femininity his mother passes down to him; as the son of a mortal king and divine sea nymph, he walks a line between humanity and divinity on the path to fulfilling the prophecy of being "the best warrior of the generation," foretold by Eleithyia, the "goddess of childbirth, rumored to preside over the birth of half-gods," (38). His choices reflect his willingness to use his divine powers, and they show how he more closely aligns with his divine mother, Thetis, than with his mortal father, Peleus. The connection with motherhood is also shown in *Fantomina* and *Orlando*, as "Fantomina" becomes a mother shortly before being sent away by her mother, and Orlando's last major life event is a pregnancy that goes unmentioned and uncelebrated, even though the only two characters present in the moment are Orlando themself and the newborn baby. The unique

bond between mother and child exists as the strongest relationship with the most long-lasting impact in *The Song of Achilles*. In Achilles' case, Thetis' power is intimately tied to the ocean, and Achilles also leans more toward female generativity and non-heteronormative forms of creativity as a source of power. Thetis' abandonment of her "husband"/rapist Peleus and her return to the sea after Achilles' birth signals her recognition of the primacy of these primordial relationships and the power that they confer outside of human social and political structures.

Chodorow, in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, suggests that a "woman's psychological capabilities for parenting are built into her personality through her continuing intense relationship with her own mother" (Lorber 483). In Miller's retelling of the Greek myths, Thetis has no connection to a mother and is identified only as a nymph who is "wily" like Proteus, her father, "the slippery old man of the sea" (19). In the absence of an individual human or divine mother, the sea, Thalassa's body, nurtures Thetis, and this helps to account for her continued connection and repeated returns to the ocean. Through her close and constant association with the sea, Thetis truly becomes the sea, and proximity to the sea is proximity to Thetis; unlike male sea-divinities such as Poseidon or Proteus, who exert authority *over* the sea, Thetis appears, in some ways, to be a personification or embodiment of the sea itself, connected organically and essentially to its power and life-force.

Rather than achieving power through the conventional forms of motherhood expected of mortals, Thetis gains fame, along with power and authority within ancient Greek society, through Achilles' death and his abilities as a half-god on the battlefield at Troy. Her interactions with Patroclus and Achilles, in turn manifest her connection to—and identity with—the sea. When they wish to avoid being seen by Thetis, they avoid spending time near the sea. Their interactions with the goddess grant a deeper understanding of the range of Thetis' abilities as a divine

feminine being associated with the sea. The sea is a component of Thetis' identity; it contributes to the formation of Achilles' identity and of his relationship with Patroclus, and Achilles' and Patroclus' caution toward the sea reflects their awareness of the complexity of the sea as a vast and, for humans, largely unknowable conceptual and experiential domain. Achilles and Patroclus will never be able fully to understand the sea because it is inherently feminine, as Thalassa's body. Even though they are non-heteronormative characters, they are still men, so the closest they will be able to come to understanding the feminine power that resides in the sea is through feminine individuals such as Thetis.

In order to meet any human character, Thetis must first emerge from the sea. Achilles often has private meetings with his mother, but in order to do so, he must sneak out before other mortals wake and wait for her on the beach. Even though Achilles is a powerful man with no equal, he must go out of his way and wait for Thetis. In these situations, Thetis always holds the upper hand, since she can decide whether or not to emerge from the sea to meet her visitor. She, however, can summon Achilles, and he comes to her. She has the ability to venture onto land to see him, but she is powerful enough not to have to do so. As his mother and a divine being, she demands enough respect that she can remain in the setting where she holds the most power, the sea. When she ventures onto land, her abilities and strength decrease with the increasing distance between her physical body and that of the sea. When meeting his mother on the shore, the sea is an impassible barricade to Achilles.

In conversations with Patroclus, Achilles mentions that Thetis wants him to come into the sea and live with her in "caves under the sea," yet he chooses to remain on land and never to enter the sea, since "no mortal who sees them comes back the same" (15). These statements imply that the sea is a barrier that he cannot cross if he wishes to continue straddling the line

between humanity and immortality. Were Achilles to enter the sea, his mortal identity would die as he would achieve a different form of divinity by becoming a part of Thalassa, and he would be defined only as Thetis' son, as opposed to being immortalized through his own efforts as a war hero. Among other divine beings within the sea, he would be treated as inferior because of his human qualities. His relation to Thetis would be emphasized and enforced in a way that would be unfamiliar and unwelcome to Achilles, since he is only familiar with patriarchal methods of establishing status and authority. His wariness of the sea is an acknowledgment of the power Thetis holds and a recognition that the sea is not the right place for a mortal man, as the values, priorities, and sources and measures of power in the sea are fundamentally different from those found in human communities. Achilles' status as a demi-god complicates his relationship to the spaces mortal and immortal beings should inhabit, with his masculinity prioritized in the patriarchal mortal society and his connection to femininity highlighted in his connection to divinity through his mother. Thetis' role as a character is first as a mother, so her female qualities should be acknowledged along with her divinity. This understanding of Thetis as primarily feminine suggests a parallel to the novel's other important female character, the mortal Briseis.

Briseis' final descent into the sea establishes a parallel to Thetis and provides grounds to argue that the two may function as two distinct embodiments of the same primal source, Thalassa. Pyrrhus throws a spear at Briseis as she tries to escape into the sea after she strikes him, and it "hits her back like a stone tossed onto a floating leaf" as the sea's "black water swallows her whole" (360). Rather than be forced to obey a man, Briseis rushes into the dark sea for salvation, much as does Thetis who, as soon as "her sentence was finished, . . . ran out of the house and dove back into the sea" (19). This parallel between the two characters illustrates claims that Serpil Oppermann makes about the need for a new understanding of past sexual

ideals, based on readings of "literary and cultural texts where female corporeality and nonhuman bodies are problematized, contested, and disrupted" (81). Briseis' need to immerse herself into the sea rather than be submissive to a man reflects ideas about femininity during the Greek Heroic Age. The Greek physician Hippocrates of Cos created and perpetuated the idea that "unmarried girls at menarche are liable to become delirious and to throw themselves down wells and drown, since the menstrual blood cannot properly flow until the 'orifice of egress' has been opened up through intercourse" (Garland 40). This concept suggests that women were treated as sexual objects from the earliest possible age, while also perpetuating the stereotype that women are experiencing hysteria or insanity whenever they make a decision that does not directly benefit men in some way. Briseis' and Thetis' return to the sea, however, suggests another understanding of women's relationship to Thalassa's impenetrable depths as a source of feminine power and a place of refuge from the patriarchal demands of terrestrial society.

Whereas Greeks of the Heroic Age might classify Briseis as a hysterical woman, Thetis and Briseis might better be understood, then, as women reaching for control and agency through their connection to the sea. Thetis continually emerges from the sea, and Briseis brings closure to this arrival by being the last woman to enter the sea with the importance of her entrance emphasized as a dive into the sea to escape from Pyrrhus, Achilles' son. She never resurfaces but instead becomes one with the sea, uniting herself with Thetis, and in doing so she fulfills the destiny that Thetis offered to Achilles by living forever with her under the sea. Briseis sheds her fragile mortality by immersing herself in the sea and choosing a version of female agency immune from subjugation to a violent patriarchal order.

Both Briseis and Thetis gain power to escape from men by entering the sea. When Briseis escapes from Pyrrhus, she is escaping from the gendered power dynamics of her patriarchal,

mortal society. In contrast, divine society focuses on power rather than gender. Thetis is raped by Peleus because of the tricks of unnamed "gods" who are more powerful than she in their cunning, but Peleus "seized her" because of the goddess Eleithyia's prophecy (19). Although the rape reflects familiar patriarchal power dynamics, a divine female's words provide the catalyst for the event. Briseis, from a mortal perspective, rejects Pyrrhus' oppressive male force and embraces femininity and exercises the freedom to choose her destiny by returning to Thalassa, the primordial sea-mother. At this time, Pyrrhus "is only twelve, but he does not look it" or act like it since he is already a lord who commands others (359). In a different sense, Briseis rejects mortal rules and swims into a form of immortality. Because she never resurfaces, no one witnesses Briseis's death, leaving open the possibility that she never dies. Instead, she crosses the line between mortality and immortality that Achilles so often walked. Her character is absorbed into the domain associated with Thetis. Since she has lost the relief she found in the character of Patroclus, who leans more toward feminine qualities when contrasted to other Greek males, Briseis turns to a different and more stable source of feminine power in the sea with Thetis.

In order to become Achilles' mother, Thetis is forced from her sea sanctuary into the violent, male-oriented mortal world. Even as she fights Peleus, "blood from the wounds she had given him mixed with the smears of lost maidenhead on her thighs"; after being defiled, her agency is stripped from her as "a deflowering was as binding as marriage laws" (Miller 19). Being separated from the sea, her source of power, she is oppressed in a foreign and hostile environment. Achilles becomes the ball-and-chain who prevents her from exercising the power that comes from her divinity. After his birth, she recognizes that her feminine power as a sea-nymph is more important to her identity than her role as a mother. Even though she returns often

to visit Achilles, she never stays for long because not even her son "could eclipse the stain of his [Peleus'] dirty, mortal mediocrity" (20). Her newly gained identity as a mother will never eclipse her primary identity and place of belonging, and this leads her to return to the sea. However, she still plays a material role in her own way. The plot of the entire novel is in fact driven by Thetis' efforts to be a good mother in a human environment that is foreign to her as a goddess. Tragedy ensues because she has been forced into a role, as the wife and mother of mortal men, that she does not want to and cannot fill. Achilles comes from violence and trauma as a child of rape, and his life ends in a similarly violent manner. Whereas Thetis emerges from the sea to experience trauma of a forced marriage with a mortal, Briseis enters the sea to escape a similar trauma of physical and sexual abuse. These beginning and ending events suggest an inverse relationship between the two characters.

Besides these pivotal moments, Briseis and Thetis mirror each other in what readers can glimpse of their personalities. When living as Achilles' property on the beaches outside the walls of Troy, Briseis becomes well-known for her skill in storytelling. Even though she speaks a different language from the Greeks, she is intelligent and adept at sharing knowledge through stories. This skill distinguishes her, as does her knowledge about the environment as a native to the region, as she "seemed to know all its secrets, just as Chiron had" (Miller 244). Thetis, for her part, requests that Patroclus share his stories about Achilles after Achilles' and Patroclus' deaths. Thetis' request reveals a softer side of her femininity even as she uses her divine power to compel Patroclus to do as she wishes. Even so, she exhibits a generosity toward Achilles and Patroclus because of her motherhood; similarly, Briseis' storytelling abilities entertain and soothe the girls who come into the Greek encampment as prisoners of war. In both contexts, storytelling is a soothing element that promotes understanding and compassion when directed

toward women, two traits that are commonly associated with the stereotype of demure femininity. For both Briseis and Thetis, storytelling is associated with Patroclus, a character whose gender expression is in some ways ambivalent, giving an interesting angle to each story he shares.

Since he plays a more feminine role than the prototypical archaic Greek male in his roles as a healer and caretaker, both for the other Greek soldiers and in his relationship with Achilles, Patroclus acts as a more accessible point of contact for Briseis and Thetis. In this case, feminist readings highlight the power difference in gendered binaries. Since Patroclus is the reason Achilles saves Briseis, he also becomes the reason she is able to share her talents as a storyteller and her connection to the environment. Patroclus tells Achilles, "Take her as your prize. Before Agamemnon does. Please" (226). Briseis' life is saved because of Patroclus' request. They are able to build a friendship of trust and understanding before the climax of the plot, after which they are separated forever. Because of his relationship with Briseis, Patroclus learns more about how to tell stories properly; then, from his deeper relationship with Achilles, he is able to share more stories about Achilles with Thetis than any other friend or comrade could, since Patroclus is not only Achilles' friend but also his lover.

Encamped on the beach, Achilles and Patroclus are constantly in the protective gaze of Thetis' power. For Briseis, this means that Thetis is always overseeing her actions. Since Briseis' presence is a major catalyst for the plot, Thetis could change how Briseis affects the plot, but she chooses not to intervene. This allows Briseis to fulfill a role that aligns with Thetis' interests, catalyzing the events that lead to Achilles' fame. Achilles acts in ways that threaten Agamemnon's masculinity and pride, and Agamemnon seeks revenge by treating Briseis as a possession to be taken to damage Achilles' pride: "Briseis was a war prize, a living embodiment

of Achilles' honor. In taking her, Agamemnon denied Achilles the full measure of his worth," (271). Agamemnon takes away the one female over whom Achilles has control. Briseis' commodified presence allows Achilles to gain more power as a warrior and be remembered in Greek history; his successes, in turn, fulfill Thetis' wishes as a divine mother.

Despite Achilles' martial successes, his tragic end forces Thetis to acknowledge her son's mortality. Thetis' role as a mother is doomed from the start, since her hopes for Achilles to become fully immortal fail to acknowledge his inevitable mortality as the son of mortal man. Even as "she wished him to be a god," Thetis as a lesser deity does not have enough power to help along his transformation (54). Her greatest source of power is the sea itself, which explains why she proposes that they live together with her under the sea for eternity—that is the extent of the divine power that she can offer him. As Celsiana Warwick argues, ideas of life and fertility are inevitably in conflict with death and destruction. As a mother, Thetis can never find any satisfaction or happiness, and this helps to explain her choice to retreat from the male-oriented mortal world and to live immersed in the feminine sea rather than with her mortal son. In the end, the sea will support her, while her son will die. The trauma she endures can never be assuaged. Thetis realizes this at the beginning, which is why she is unable to be a mother in a conventional way and is always more closely tied to her identity as a sea-nymph, and this is why her visits to Achilles are limited in time and usually occur at the seashore. Her immortality as a divine being is more central to her identity than her ephemeral role as a mother to a mortal man.

Thetis' immortal divinity can be understood as a manifestation of the underlying, primordial power of the eternal, feminine sea, personified as Thalassa. When Thetis first comes into contact with humans and meets Achilles' father Peleus, he sexually assaults her, and the gods facilitate her rape. After hearing of the prophecy that Thetis' son will be "the best warrior

of the generation," the gods push her into a life of suffering (38). After giving birth to Achilles and fulfilling her forced marital duties, she rejects her mortal son and the grief inherent in mortal life by returning to the sea. She seeks the comfort of Thalassa by immersing herself in Thalassa's aqueous body, and she surrounds herself with the power of her own femininity, the sea's feminine power, of which she is a personification. The power of Thalassa, the sea, nourishes and sustains Thetis' divinity, whereas human marriage and maternity are roles that the gods ensnare her to play for a short time. When Achilles confirms his mortality by dying, she is freed from the ties to mortality and suffering that the gods imposed upon her, but she is left with the jagged grief of being powerless to save her only son: "'I cannot go beneath the earth…I could not make him a god" (367). Her inability to be present for Achilles in life or death is one reason that she grants Patroclus' wish for peace in death. She acknowledges Patroclus' identity and his role in Achilles' life by carving his name onto the stone above the lovers' shared tomb. Patroclus tells stories to share the truth with Thetis when he tells her, "*I am buried here. In your son's grave*," (364). Patroclus' story motivates Thetis to unite him to Achilles in the afterlife. His story is a gift that allows Thetis to show true kindness and compassion as a mother who is still trying to do her best for her son. Even when finally freed from her motherly duties, Thetis tries to act the part of a mother and, in the process, reclaims the feminine power that was stolen from her at Achilles' conception.

Briseis also achieves freedom and immortality through union with Thalassa, the sea. Her mortal life has been a process of playing along with the whims of men. After the loss of Patroclus, she loses her connection to mortal femininity since he was the only object of her love and her only protector against other men. When Pyrrhus pushes her hand, she runs to the godlike, immortal embrace of the sea. Briseis assumes aspects of immortality when she does not emerge

after diving into the sea, with no clear evidence that she has died. Like Thetis, Briseis submerges herself in the sea because she seeks to exist in a space invisible to mortal eyes, merging entirely with Thetis and with Thalassa, the divine sea, and in the process, she gains a semblance of divinity. She rejects her mortal existence, and the sea shares its immortality with her. Thetis and Briseis symbolically become one by fusing their identities with the sea. Whereas Briseis fuses with Thetis in a way that Achilles never can or does, Achilles reveals aspects of his mother's divinity in his own identity performance.

Achilles displays identifiable forms of femininity, which show the strongest link to the divinity he has inherited from Thetis. Physically, he is portrayed as a "cold shock of beauty, deep-green eyes, features fine as a girl's," and his presence makes him stand out since "his beauty shone like a flame" among other men (Miller 21, 26). His distinctly feminine form of beauty enhances his masculine power. Thetis, in turn, exploits this feminine quality in her son in her efforts to fight Achilles' inevitable mortality. Surrounded by the sea on the tiny island of Scyros, Thetis disguises Achilles as a woman to shield him from the inevitable fruition of Eleithyia's prophecy; her strategy to fight fate and mortality is to make Achilles perform a new identity as a woman under the name of "Pyrrha." While disguised as a woman, Achilles sleeps with Deidameia and fathers Pyrrhus, who later attempts to assault Briseis. When engaged in this perversion of heteronormativity with Deidameia and dressed as a woman, Achilles upsets traditional ideals in ways that later have dire repercussions in the predatory and misogynistic behavior of Pyrrhus, whose compensatory and excessive masculinity turns him into a violent child who murders and rapes. Emerging from a symbolically feminized union, Pyrrhus displays the most toxic masculine traits, countering the submissive and obedient qualities that Thetis forced his father to adopt at this time of his conception.

Thetis' response to the tragic fact of Achilles' mortality is to surround him with different versions of femininity in hopes of enveloping and fully concealing him within a female space. She takes her methods further by forcing Achilles and Deidameia to get married and commanding Deidameia's father, King Lycomedes: "You will continue to shelter Achilles here. You will say nothing of who he is. In return, your daughter will one day be able to claim a famous husband," (133). In this way, Thetis exerts her strongest forms of power, through her femininity and close ties with the sea: like the powerful male figures in the story, Thetis is capable of using others as pawns to realize her ambitions, such as manipulating and controlling women including Deidameia and the disguised and feminized Achilles. She brings Achilles to Scyros to remake him in her own, feminine image on an island surrounded by wide swaths of sea. This leads to the conception of Pyrrhus, whose violence prompts Briseis' eventual union with the sea. These major events are fueled by the will, power, and actions of a female divinity, Thetis, who derives her power from the primordial feminine power of Thalassa, the sea.

Feminine power exemplified through divinity drives the plot of *The Song of Achilles*, since the main male characters would not exist or succeed without the contributions of Thetis and her mortal counterpart, Briseis. As a decisive pawn, Briseis sparks Achilles' ego and desire for vengeance, which leads to Patroclus' and Achilles' eventual deaths and posthumous glory and displaces Thetis from her role as a mother. Thetis seeks to prevent Achilles from becoming a war hero, and in the process, she loses her chance to guide him as a mother along a less fatal path. Achilles, however, is merely a pawn who demonstrates the inevitability of mortality. His mortality highlights the divine feminine power found in Thetis and acquired through association by Briseis, who mirrors Thetis' immortality and appears to escape mortality through union with the sea. Thetis' power, in turn, derives from her role as a personification of the primordial

divine—and feminine—power of the sea. After both Achilles and Patroclus have passed into the realm of death, Thetis remains. Her power is now limited to the sea, since she no longer has a reason to exercise her power on land; without Achilles, there is no reason for Thetis to engage further with the patriarchal—and mortal—kingdoms of men. She is the feminine embodiment of the sea, and she will likely stay within her domain of power. She functions as the origin and the endpoint of *The Song of Achilles*, since she extends far beyond the boundaries of the novel, just as the sea extends far beyond the limits of human knowledge and human existence.

Chapter 2

Capitalistic Love: The Transactional Relationship Boundary within *Fantomina*

The eponymous protagonist of Eliza Haywood's novella *Fantomina*, whose identity remains veiled behind her alias of "Fantomina," struggles to solidify her feminine power while constricted by the gendered expectations of eighteenth-century English society. As *Fantomina*'s protagonist continually reinvents herself within the framework of a patriarchal hierarchy, progressively inhabiting different socio-economic positions, she calls into question societal understandings and expectations of what femininity is and how it should look. Through her varied and transgressive expressions of femininity, "Fantomina" as a character exposes the double standards in the construction and enforcement of gender roles as she pursues power in a patriarchal and hierarchical culture.

Fantomina is subtitled *Love in a Maze*, which builds upon the idea of navigating a labyrinth of social expectations. Within the novel, the main character, "Fantomina," spends the majority of her time trying to enrapture the attention of Beauplaisir, a man who sought her attention one night at the theatre. When "Fantomina" begins her entanglement with Beauplaisir, "she had the Satisfaction to find his Love in his Assiduity: He was there before her; and nothing cou'd be more tender than the Manner in which he accosted her" (261). From the start of their relationship, she is charmed by his attentions and punctuality to be fully present at their meetings and his eagerness to spend time with her. Yet, permanence is never possible in their relationship since the two have not met on equal footing with respect to socio-economic status. Since Beauplaisir first came upon her "in the Fashion of those Women who make sale of their Favours," he believes himself to be a man of high societal rank approaching a "suppos'd

Prostitute" (258). Although she "set herself in the Way of being accosted as such a one" by masquerading as a sex-worker, "Fantomina" did not fully understand the scope of the negative consequences of her performance of this role, since "at that Time no other Aim, than the Gratification of an innocent Curiosity" was her motive (258). She decided to disguise herself based on her wish to discover the freedom of living as a different type of woman, but she did not fully consider the transactional quality of the type of relationship she creates with Beauplaisir. She fails to grasp a "woman's permanent position as a commodity, a product of the intersection between capitalism and patriarchy," which places women in the area of objectivity instead of subjectivity (Zimmerman 427). Whereas she views her actions as a performance that aims at gaining attentions and assiduity from the opposite sex, Beauplaisir views their interaction as paying a price to use a product. In this scenario, the price includes spending time wooing "Fantomina" with affectionate words and behavior. An added motive for "Fantomina"'s actions in hiding her identity behind the persona of "Fantomina" relates to her status and experience as a wealthy heiress who is used to men approaching her with ulterior motives. After experiencing being courted by men whose hidden intentions involve her person, mind, and most often money, she continues to adopt the role of "Fantomina" and other feminine personae to make certain that Beauplaisir is attracted to her as an individual and not to her fortune. Her decision to make herself, in her guise as a sex-worker, the commodity that he seeks is more understandable since she verifies in this manner that she is desirable without the other aspects of her identity, including her wealth or actual social status, coming into play. With the pair firmly inhabiting and understanding the commercialized patriarchy of eighteenth-century England, they take equally complicit roles as "buyer" and "seller" in their exchange of goods.

Beyond her initial, curious attempt at dressing and performing as a sex-worker, "Fantomina" falls into a routine of acting as different types of women from varying socio-economic backgrounds, and she does so in a manner that highlights her awareness of the forms of power available to women within the proto-capitalistic society she inhabits. As an individual who always presents herself in a feminine form, she does not have many prominent female figures in her life besides a strict mother and a negligent aunt. Without any role models for feminine behavior, she imitates the gestures, costumes, and speech of women of other social classes whom she has heretofore only observed at a distance; therefore, she only has a superficial understanding of their characters based on their appearance. This is exemplified in her personae, which only extend to the outward appearance of the feminine roles that she adopts, such as clothing and accents. When she begins her scheme to continue chasing Beauplaisir by revising her identity performance, she

> wisely considering that Complaints, Tears, Swooning, and all the Extravagancies which Women make use of in such Cases, have little Prevailence over a Heart inclin'd to rove, and only serve to render those who practice them more contemptible, by robbing them of that Beauty which alone can bring back the fugitive Lover, she resolved to take another Course...with her Sex's Modesty, she had not also thrown off another Virtue equally valuable, tho' generally unfortunate, *Constancy*. (267-268)

All of her disguises at different socio-economic levels reflect an understood and unstated knowledge of how a woman's "constancy" is assessed and valued based on how she presents herself. "Fantomina" strives to achieve some degree of stasis even though "a doubleness is needed to produce the self as woman, to represent (her) self" (Smith 58). Her successful schemes to inhabit varying feminine roles fall outside the realm of socially permissible action for women,

since patriarchal society seeks to limit women's agency. As she takes on all of these active personae, "Fantomina" embodies the typically masculine role of pursuer, which would be off limits to women. Her personae allow her to obtain a power by slipping from one female role to another, never fully inhabiting any role so as not to fall victim to the constraints that a patriarchal society imposes on every type of woman, although to varying extents depending on their socio-economic status. This is further illumined when she uses her higher economic status to enhance her agency as a performer by exploiting the mobility that her wealthy societal position affords her; however, capitalism is closely tied to the patriarchy in a way that makes "Fantomina" at once an active participant in transactional exchanges while also painting her in the negative light of a temptress, or monster.

The concept that women are forced to negotiate the dichotomy of saintly virgin or tainted sinner is perpetuated in a variety of patriarchal works. For example, Alexander Pope's "Epistle to a Lady," a poem that was published in 1743, details the types of sinful behaviors that degrade a woman's worth and respectability, aligning closely with the kind of behavior that "Fantomina" often portrays:

> Wise Wretch! with Pleasures too refin'd to please,
> With too much Spirit to be e'er at ease,
> With too much Quickness ever to be taught,
> With too much Thinking to have common Thought:
> You purchase Pain with all that Joy can give,
> And die of nothing but a Rage to live. (ll. 95-100)

In this excerpt, qualities that would be praised and desirable in a man qualify a woman as a "wretch," which emphasizes why "Fantomina" chooses to disguise her identity through her

personae rather than to have her reputation ruined by being devalued as a woman. The expectations of feminine humility in eighteenth-century England stand in stark contrast to "Fantomina," who chases power and her desired man. So, too, Richard Allestree, in *The Ladies Calling* (1673), divides the first part of his influential conduct book into five sections labelled: "Of Modesty," "Of Meekness," "Of Compassion," "Of Affibility," and "Of Piety." Viewing these sections as the ideal and expected qualities of femininity, one recognizes that the type of woman who is forward and active in her desired pursuits would be seen as the opposite of desirable or domesticable. If every woman has to fit into one of two dichotomous categories of either domestication or wretchedness, she must be either a devilish temptress or a saintly mother figure.

"Fantomina" definitely occupies the negative side of this culturally constructed binary, if she fits into it at all. The same is true of Thetis and Orlando, as all three characters operate in unconventional positions with regard to—and raise questions about—motherhood. By having children outside of the circumstances expected by a heteronormative, patriarchal society, they break the mold of traditional femininity and open up the possibility for women to inhabit a variety of roles across a spectrum of gendered, socio-economic, and moral economies. It is precisely the need to question the established system that grants *Fantomina* such an important role in women's literature. As the reputable demure woman of higher society who is inaccessible to the reader, "Fantomina" is able to slip between the saint and sinner roles easily by putting on and taking off masks. Her lack of a stable identity places her outside the standard sphere of judgment by which society polices women's behavior. "Fantomina" uses her reputation as a fluid extension of self that can be picked up and put down as she pleases, like a mask or disguise, with no lasting consequences in the eyes of the public.

The feminine aspiration to shape-shift or metamorphose one's appearance to reach a form of emancipation and empowerment appears in other early eighteenth-century English literary texts. Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, discusses the desire for a feminine transformation through a nymph in her poem, "Adam Pos'd":

> In all her Airs, in all her antick Graces,
>
> Her various Fashions, and more various Faces;
>
> How had it pos'd that Skill, which late assign'd
>
> Just Appellations to Each several Kind!
>
> A right Idea of the Sight to frame;
>
> T'have guest from what New Element she came;
>
> T'have hit the wav'ring Form, or giv'n this Thing a Name. (ll. 5-11)

The idea of a woman, or in particular a nymph, having the skill to engage in multiple superficial performances through her fashion and face anticipates and largely parallels both the disguises of "Fantomina" and the gender-fluid presentation of Orlando. In both cases, the ability to transform is a skill that opens up access to a new kind of power and mobility that their previously fixed societal roles did not allow. In another connection, Finch's representation of femininity in her poem being a nymph brings to mind Thetis, who is a sea-nymph. Finch's imagination of woman as a divine being with shape-shifting powers to which men have no access anticipates, in turn, Orlando's ability to evade the constraints of patriarchal binarisms of gender and language. The capacity to transform in body and name gives women the chance to succeed in a way inaccessible to men in eighteenth-century England.

The utility of societal reputation as a means of deflecting any damaging reflection from her personae onto "Fantomina"'s actual identity makes it an essential element of her identity. In

each of her performances, “Fantomina” dons a disguise that protects her reputation by distancing her persona from her actual identity. The name “Fantomina” is not even her true name: she is described, before she takes on the name of her first persona, only as “A YOUNG Lady of distinguished Birth, Beauty, Wit, and Spirit,” (257). By adopting several names of her own making, such as “Celia,” “Mrs. Bloomer,” and “Incognita,” along with the primary alias “Fantomina,” she creates a double layer of disguise that hides her identity within society as well as in the text of the novella; since the reader is also a member of society, they are also not privy to the identity that she conceals.

“Fantomina”’s use of language as a part of her disguise continues as she adopts different accents and dialogues for each of her crafted identities. When she travels to Bath to portray the character of Celia, she “join’d with a broad Country Dialect, a rude unpolish’d Air, which she, having been bred in these Parts, knew very well how to imitate,” to sell her crafted disguise by means beyond her physical presentation (268). The reason her dialect change works well is because of “the way our everyday language seeks to domesticate the real” through the voiding that signification requires (Hughes 45). Signification functions through the arbitrary relationship between a signifier and a signified, or a word and the meaning associated with it. (Klages 270) “Fantomina” understands the triviality and essentially emptiness of the language she uses while in disguise. The words themselves are unimportant; what matters to her is how well her language works to enhance the believability of her current disguise. In this way, “Fantomina” utilizes language as a tool in her arsenal of deception in order to resist being victimized by patriarchal domestication or being swept into believing her own carefully crafted but false performances. As she traverses different social circles, she adapts to fit in at a surface level, which parallels the lack of depth that signification entails; since she does not intend to make any lasting impact on

anyone she encounters during her mission to seduce Beauplaisir's adoration, the effort to develop an understanding of others or of self would be a waste of energy.

Considering the ideal domestic qualities of femininity, the question of "virtue" arises in *Fantomina*. "Fantomina" faces a choice between reputation and "virtue" as she is required to make a decision that protects one while hurting the other. If her reputation operates as a direct result of her true identity, which she works to protect, it is obvious that reputation will take priority over "virtue" in her personal life, which is unseen by the public eye. For women, "virtue" is often treated as being synonymous with chastity and virginity. At the same time, "Fantomina" utilizes her disguises to separate her personal actions from her public reputation, which allows her "virtue" to be perceived as intact, especially when considering that "virtue" is a socially constructed concept. If her reputation remains protected, her culturally valued "virtue" should be protected as well. These ideas present themselves in *Orlando* as well, with the personification of Ladies Chastity, Purity, and Modesty when Orlando undergoes their gender transformation from male to female. If these core traits create and preserve femininity, the ideally respected feminine identity will not be threatened as long as they remain intact in a public sphere, sustained at a performative level.

"Fantomina," however, complicates the functionality of "virtue" as an individual who plots reputation and "virtue" as opposing values that cannot be maintained at the same time. She uses language as a tool for her advantage and gives a new definition to the concept of "virtue":

> She had Discernment to forsee, and avoid all those Ills which might attend the Loss of her *Reputation*, but was wholly blind to those of the Ruin of her *Virtue*; and having managed her Affairs so as to secure the one, grew perfectly easy with the Remembrance, she had forfeited the *other*. (265-266)

As this passage suggests, her “virtue” is lost as a result of the very lies and deception she spreads to protect her reputation. In this sense, her “virtue” appears to depend upon the stratagem of lying and falsifying her identity. The fate of her “virtue” depends upon her forfeiting her true identity for a constructed reality. By purposely distancing herself from her public identity and her reputation *in propria persona*, “Fantomina,” the novella suggests, is the first to sully the purity of her person. By choosing to masquerade as someone else, she uses the only agency available to her and, in the process, loses her “virtue.” As a result, “Fantomina”’s choice to disguise herself in social settings eventually leads to negative changes in her bodily condition as well as her internal identity.

The end for “Fantomina” occurs when she is no longer able to sustain her masquerade of identities, as her ability to control her feminine body falls apart. She has had to exert careful control over her female form herself since no feminine figures are present in her life, and the return of her long-absent mother brings ruin for her form, because the condition of her body cannot be hidden from the maternal gaze and does not bear comparison to her mother’s maternal femininity: “She found the Consequences of her amorous Follies would be, without almost a Miracle, impossible to be concealed: – She was with Child” (287). Her pregnancy is quickly discovered since she stays in the circle of urban society rather than “going into the Country, where her Mother design’d to send her, and from whence she intended to make her escape to some Place where she might be delivered with Secrecy” (287). When her mother discovers the truth of her illness, she immediately turns to the cause, seeking to normalize her daughter’s position within the patriarchal and heterosexual social order by summoning Beauplaisir to the residence where “Fantomina” has just given birth in hopes that he will acknowledge paternity and marry “Fantomina.” When faced with the truth of the situation, Beauplaisir meets the women

with feigned confusion: “What mean you Madam? I your Undoing, who never harbour’d the least Design on you in my Life” (290). Focusing on the actual words that “Fantomina” is so versed at using, Beauplaisir slips out of blame by turning against her the deceit and role-playing that she employed when pursuing him. He turns the transparent practice of masquerade against her by using it as a disingenuous pretext to claim innocence and to deny that he knowingly abused a woman of status.

Flipping the mirror back onto “Fantomina,” he is able to slide free from any blame in the circumstance and from any responsibility for “Fantomina” and her child, which points to a larger question involving forged truth and shadowed reality. The unlikelihood that Beauplaisir “should have been blinded so often by her Artifices; or she, that so young a Creature should have the Skill to make use of them” suggests the possibility, even the probability, that Beauplaisir has taken advantage of “Fantomina” by luring her with a false belief in her own agency (290). He cheats “Fantomina” the entire time and uses what she thinks is her power as his means of escape from any consequence. Even in her last role, as “Incognita,” she protects her identity and upholds the disguise in spite of his pleas to know her true identity: “he could not submit to receive Obligations from a Lady, who thought him uncapable of keeping a Secret, which she made no Difficulty of letting her Servants into. – He resented, – he once more entreated” (286). She lets him leave resentful and begging rather than inform him of her true identity, which lends a sharper edge to his feigned pretentions of ignorance with respect to her real identity and pregnancy. He probably had seen through her disguise and decided to keep using her for his own sexual benefit with the superficial excuse that he was being gentlemanly by not calling out her lie. Even with the armor of her disguises, “Fantomina” as an individual is never protected or empowered compared to Beauplaisir, a fact that he lords above her at the end.

As “the mirror stage marks a critical and determining moment in a subject’s psychic development,” the final episode of “Fantomina”’s story makes clear the impossibility within a patriarchal society of escaping the male gaze that makes women objects and commodities (Lynch 210). “Fantomina” realizes that she had been fooled and used, which is why she accepts being sent to a French convent, where she is able to escape the male gaze and has the opportunity truly to be herself by being alone with herself. A major contributing factor to “Fantomina”’s isolation is the removal of her daughter, which parallels Orlando’s relationship with their son. All of Orlando’s actions reflect a consistent yearning and need to achieve a form of solitude. Aligning this primal desire to be alone with a foundational aspect of human experience, humans’ first and most persistent “homing” impulse is “to inhabit” oneself (Hughes 38). This location of home within a solitary, interior space validates the self, physically and mentally, regardless of the changes to and in the location of the body that exists to serve only one person: the self. Exiled alone to France, a distant country unfamiliar to her, “Fantomina” remains unmoved internally because her unchanging home is located within herself, even though this home has undergone the transformations of pregnancy and childbirth. The removal of her daughter effectively removes the role and obligations of motherhood for “Fantomina” mentally, internally, and tangibly.

At the same time, the prospect of “Fantomina” becoming a nun introduces another new type of female sexualization that roles set aside for females often hold: the fetishized role of the “super-sexual nun.” According to Choudhury, “male clerics and the laity were caught between two opposing visions of nuns as either exceptional holy women or intrinsically sexual creatures, figures of virtue or figures of vice,” which led to women being configured “in terms of their sexuality and women’s sexuality in terms of pollution and corruption” (13). These patriarchal

conceptions of nuns during the eighteenth century in France harken back to the dichotomy that Pope creates by juxtaposing domesticity and "wretchedness" in English society. Despite her solitude, readers now have the ability to craft and vicariously to enjoy an image of "Fantomina" as a nun, which emphasizes "Fantomina"'s true lack of agency and power in France as well as in England.

Fantomina implies the inability for women to achieve and exercise real power while trying to obtain leverage using patriarchal tools. "Fantomina" uses her socio-economic status to elaborate and enact her personae, but this places her at a disadvantage in capitalistic eighteenth-century England. As long as she remains within the system from which she is trying to escape, there is no space for her to reach actual freedom or exercise true feminine power. Perhaps she is finally freed from the shackles of the male gaze only in her newfound haven in the convent. Then again, the price of this freedom is her degradation as a woman and a romantic interest, which both placed "Fantomina" in the objectified position of a commodity. In the end, she loses her socio-economic status, her love interest, her role as daughter, and the potential to be a mother to her own daughter as she is exiled to a French convent. Her attempt to gain agency and control of her life is wholly unsuccessful because she attempted to use the patriarchal order set up by and for men for her own feminine purposes.

Chapter 3

Outside the Binary: Gender Fluidity Breaking Patriarchal Constructs in *Orlando: A Biography*

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* explores the interchangeability of identity through the experiences of the gender-fluid protagonist. As a character, Orlando (they, them, their) embodies both masculine and feminine qualities as they move back and forth along a spectrum of gender identities that defies socially constructed and systemically enforced gender binaries. The ease of their transition creates a wide space to discuss the nonbinary qualities of gender and the gray areas of sexuality. Orlando's experiences as both a woman and a man—or, as a person who is both and neither male and/nor female—calls into question and ultimately refutes patriarchal expectations by showing how personal identity and the exercise of personal agency are distinct from—and independent of—"male" or "female" gender identities.

The commodified feminine litters the biography within *Orlando* in different ways. At the start of the novel, Orlando is a young boy from a privileged upper-class background, which emphasizes the nonchalance and privilege that all boys own in a patriarchal society: belonging to the superior and rewarded gender. *Fantomina* corroborates this privilege as "Fantomina"'s socio-economic position as an upper-class woman places her at the disadvantage of having actively to hide her identity to perform feminine roles and behaviors that are otherwise inaccessible to her. To achieve agency and to protect her value as a woman of high repute, she must hide her upper-class status when performing roles not assigned to nor acceptable for women of her class status to play. Being a boy and wealthy, however, opens more doors for Orlando from a young age, and this can be seen in their treatment of women. When describing Orlando and their first encounters with girls, Woolf writes, "he was young; he was boyish; he did as nature bade him," which

means they partook of women without much thought for the women's identities or the future (21). In fact, Orlando does not think of women as human beings and instead compares them to "the wild and the weeds," since "he was no lover of garden flowers only" (21). In this dehumanization of female characters, Orlando indulges narcissistic qualities that highlight the biographical element of the novel, with Woolf's narrative asides justifying Orlando's actions as if they lacked the ability to think critically about women while identifying solely as male (Jones 157). Orlando places themself firmly in the spotlight as the protagonist by devaluing supporting characters. This dehumanization of other characters focuses attention on Orlando themself and on the way they view themself as a gendered being in juxtaposition to others.

When Orlando is kneeling before the Queen, this embodiment of strong and gender-crossing feminine power comments on qualities of Orlando's appearance that speak to traditionally feminine characteristics. Although the specific identification is not made in the novel, the Queen is Elizabeth I, a monarch well known for ruling alone, without a male counterpart or King. She became famous as the Virgin Queen by "deciding to remain unwed" and "fashioning herself into the Virgin Mary for propaganda purposes" (Doran 32). Her intentional refusal to share her sovereign power with a man suggests a desire to maintain control of her position and power. Associating her image with the mother of Jesus elevates her status beyond that of a Queen to that of a being of divine status. Like Thetis, who is a sea-nymph with divine powers, Elizabeth I took matters into her own hands and endowed her position with lofty religious elements.

By introducing its protagonist to a powerful queen like Elizabeth I, the novel lays the foundation for the feminine power that Orlando views as a model to eventually acquire and wield. When gazing at Orlando, the Queen speaks of innocence in Orlando's obediently bowed

head and “the finest legs that a young nobleman has ever stood upright upon,” as well as of their violet eyes: “all qualities which the old woman loved the more they failed her” (18). The Queen’s words imply that the qualities that make up her fading femininity and desirability are present within the young Orlando. At the same time, these feminine qualities align with admirable qualities found in children more generally, which focuses attention on the traditionally pervasive infantilization of women. Sut Jhally defines infantilization as a “phenomenon by which our society systemically equates femininity with things like vulnerability, submission, uncertainty, and childhood. To be womanly today is to be, in many senses, infantile.” When Orlando shares words from Johnathan Swift, Swift is described as someone who “scorns the whole world, yet talks baby language to a girl,” implying that women need to be spoken down to and cooed at like infants who do not understand language (155). These views are consistent with sentiments Lord Chesterfield shared with his son: “Women are but children of a larger growth. . . . A man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them, humours and flatters them” (Woolf 156). When women are forced into the position of children or of objects to be played with, one cannot help but question the kinds of goals and values the patriarchy ascribes to women. If their worth is on the same level as the worth of children or objects, there can be no equal partnerships in relationships, only a hierarchy of power centered around possession and ownership. In the capitalistic relationships perpetuated by English patriarchy, a commodity is the only permanent role that a woman can hold in relation to a man who owns her in some way (Zimmerman 427). As in the transactional economy of *Fantomina*, women in *Orlando* remain objectified commodities, but the relationship dynamics shift from the equally complicit positions of adults participating in capitalist exchange to the significantly imbalanced power dynamic in which women are objectified as children who have no knowledge of or agency within the system

that men maintain. The pedophilic nature of men's desire to be in romantic and sexual relationships with women, whom they view as children, also raises red flags about the safety and treatment of both children and women.

Orlando, through their position outside of the gender binary, is able to navigate the marginalization created by the infantilization, objectification, and dismissal of women. When Orlando first shifts from a male to a female presentation, they are in the company of gipsies in Turkey who threaten their physical safety. Taking cues from a landscape that is growing progressively more barren, Orlando decides to return to England not knowing how "the young men had plotted her death. Honor, they said, demanded it, for she did not think as they did" (112). Orlando's change in gender does not align with Turkish societal views, and this places them at risk in ways that anticipate the jeopardy in which trans-individuals continue to find themselves. Leaving Turkey swiftly, Orlando buys a "complete outfit of such clothes as women then wore, and it was in the dress of a young Englishwoman of rank" before boarding a ship back to England and starting to explore, through interactions aboard, the position they now occupy as a woman in a patriarchal society (113). Orlando gains a "pleasant, lazy way of life" through lounging in the shade and is able to contemplate the heavenly ability "to resist and to yield; to yield and to resist"; they are experiencing the new limitations of being a woman, such as the expectations that a member of the "inferior" sex will be submissive and docile, while pondering "the mere pleasure of being rescued by a blue-jacket" if they were to throw themself overboard (114-115). In this situation, Orlando mocks their society's expectations of gender by toying with the idea of performing as a weak woman in order to boost the masculine ego of any strong man who helps them. The biographer, who serves as narrator, follows up on this mocking by categorizing Orlando as "like a child," as "her arguments would not commend themselves to

mature women, who have had the run of it [womanhood] all their lives" (115). In this implied step over the fourth wall, Woolf points to the maturity of women to whom the patriarchy denies autonomy while emphasizing men's naivety about all women, since Orlando has been, until very recently, a man. Orlando's thoughts offer a commentary on men's inability to understand the tribulations of being a woman unless they become one themselves. By experiencing the world from both gender perspectives, Orlando "knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each" and is bereft of the "comforts of ignorance" that they once maintained as an exclusively male person (117).

Orlando's transition from male to female is so smooth in part because of the acceptance they receive from others, in particular, men. A prominent issue for trans-individuals revolves around the possibility of "passing," of being seen and accepted as their presented gender identity. The acceptance of their gendered performance by society at large confirms their gender identity as an individual, while also lessening the threats they could potentially face, like anti-transgender violence and sexual victimization. The desire to pass as a gender-conforming member of society, "validated by cis male sexual attention," is important as "a means of gaining gender validation regarding their femininity, perhaps related to issues with internalized transmisogyny/cissexism" (Matsuzaka and Koch 37). Orlando plays into the gendered stereotypes of being a weak woman who requires a strong man as a way of acknowledging the requirements of society's binary model of gender while also validating their own current gender performance. An awareness of gender expectations and tactical compliance with them constitute a source of power of which the previously exclusively male Orlando was unaware. By presenting as female, Orlando gains a previously inaccessible power. Their gender performance changes along with their understanding of gender, even as their holistic sense of embodied identity remains constant.

Orlando's gender change is not discussed beyond their being considered a woman by the Ladies Chastity, Purity, and Modesty and by the trumpeters. These personified feminine ideals emphasize notions that are perpetuated in *Fantomina*. Whereas "Fantomina" struggles to maintain her reputation at the cost of her "virtue," in accordance with her socio-economic status, Orlando becomes almost indoctrinated into the expansive expectations required of upper-class women. Because these feminine qualities present themselves in the personified form of "Ladies" who can be seen by members of society such as the trumpeters, Orlando can make a proper transition between genders to become a woman. After the Ladies exit the room, Orlando is initially acknowledged by the trumpeters: "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" (102). The internal experience of gender appears to hold less value than external perceptions of gender, and this suggests the irrelevance of gender beyond its performative quality. Even amid this spectacular gender evolution, "Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath" (102). After being transformed into and recognized as a woman, they still use masculine pronouns while looking at their now supposedly female body, which calls into question what qualities actually constitute femininity. For Orlando, "The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity" (102). Although now inhabiting a feminine body, Orlando remains Orlando.

Orlando's experience continues to raise questions about the instability—and potential insignificance—of gender-based identity as they join London society and begin to fluctuate multiple times a day among unisex, feminine, and masculine clothing, while never mentioning a need to buy new clothes. The option of wearing unisex clothing recalls the experience of Lady

Mary Wortley Montagu in Turkey, which she describes in her *Turkish Embassy Letters*: "Montagu enjoys the liberatory potential of Turkish dress, dress which 'though entirely feminine, is also virtually identical to the items worn by men'" (Winch 55). Orlando enjoys the performative nature of gender, which operates as a central part of their current identity, but in Turkey they were unable fully to express their newfound femininity due to the androgynous quality of Turkish clothing; their experiences contrast to those of Montagu, who had experienced womanhood all her life and found unisex clothing to be a novel experience.

In order for Orlando to dress in a way that matches their desired gender mood and situation, they need to have a variety of gender-coded clothing available. This is exemplified when "she opened a cupboard in which hung still many of the clothes she had worn as a young man of fashion, and from among them she chose a black velvet suit...it fitted her to perfection and dressed in it she looked the very figure of a noble Lord" (Woolf 157). If their body remains unchanged, as this passage suggests, then Orlando's experience offers an insight into the ways gender operates as a social construct separate from embodiment. The body as experienced privately by the individual themself is a space to belong and exist, even if the individual's public identity is an unstable structure and only questionably secure. With this frame in place, Orlando's gender fluidity operates as a means of self-expression that stabilizes identity. Even within the social constructs that frame personal identity, Orlando is able to "remain subjected, body and soul, to a ceaseless and thoroughgoing permeability in relation to the world and to others," which is exhibited through gender sliding (Hughes 34). In *Orlando*, the central focus on gender identity raises the larger question of how femininity can be exhibited in such a manner as to reveal in positive and negative ways what it means to be a woman. The novel asks how the external, public dimensions of Orlando's life as a gender-fluid individual who is not tied to a

specific gender and who performs both male and female roles relates to their unchanging, internal self-identity as Orlando.

Orlando's performance in female roles is inflected by the perception, which permeates *Orlando*, that women are fundamentally monstrous; this subtext touches upon and connects multiple theories. When Orlando is still aboard the ship returning to England and is growing acquainted with their new gender identity as a woman, they think, "must I then begin to respect the opinion of the other sex, however monstrous I think it?" (115) In this moment, they are a woman speaking to women at large, which places them in the interesting position of speaking out against a group from within that group. Orlando is inhabiting a borderland between binary domains that allows them to place a foot on both sides of the line. As Gloria Anzaldúa argues, "it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions," because there will come a time when "we are on both shores at once" (100). While masculine ideas and feminine ideas stand on opposing sides, Orlando is an outlier who stands with a foot on each side and is endowed with an understanding of both genders. They have access to viewpoints that complicate and subvert the binary construction of gender. They critique other women in ways that parallel a previous instance in which women spoke of Orlando's broken heart, "he has *suffered*! They say a lady was the cause of it. The heartless monster!!! How can one of our *reputed tender sex* have had the effrontery!!!" (96) This perception of women as at once monstrous while tender and sympathetic recalls the saintly or wretch dichotomy to which women are subjected. The insistence on sainthood or monstrosity as women's only character options is degrading and underlines the limitations for gendered expression that the patriarchy enforces.

Woolf's novel also addresses multiple questions about the social construction and enforcement of the human/sub-human dichotomy. Orlando, for example, asks a multitude of rhetorical questions about race, including, "how do these leviathans to whom obviously stress, change, and activity are repugnant, propagate their kind?" (212) The notion that not just women but non-white men are monstrous beings who should not be allowed to procreate also underscores Orlando's transgression of societal norms, expectations, and practices. In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes makes claims about the fundamental equality of all men. Orlando, however, appears as an outlier to the category of humanity since their language draws a line between themselves and the rest of society, creating a space and awareness that Orlando, with their nonbinary and gender-fluid nature, does not fit into the neat categories in terms of which human "equality" is conventionally understood and described. Orlando selectively places themself in a liminal space, since their discussion of the human race comes from an external perspective that delineates Orlando as not participating in human "barbarity." In these moments of speculation about—and distaste for—people, Orlando situates themself firmly in an Other position that corresponds to their undefinable position in relation to the gender binary, as their language toward others and toward themself clearly illustrates.

By pointing out the ways in which they differ from societal norms, Orlando uses language as a tool to fight culturally assigned significations and expectations in *Orlando* not only with respect to gender but also in relation to the category of "nature." "Nature" in the novel is usually referenced in connection to water in varying forms. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the British Isles were swarmed by an immense damp that blanketed every aspect of life and, "just as the ivy and the evergreen rioted in the damp earth outside, so did the same fertility show itself within"; this atmospheric phenomenon was considered an "instigation of the heavenly hierarchy"

(Woolf 168). This passage expresses a complex layering of interconnecting images of water, divinity, and feminine fertility, all qualities that strongly connect the world of *Orlando* to the embodiment of feminine power that is Thetis. When *Orlando* begins to foreshadow fertility with the presence of storms and water, Orlando's most sustained connection with femininity begins to reveal itself. The organic and aqueous aspect of human life—and of human procreation—shapes Orlando's continued questions about the meaning of life: the "poet is Atlantic and lion in one" (149). Orlando becomes the culmination of a nature that transcends human efforts to contain and categorize, emerging in an ocean of fertile words and thoughts that expound the meaning of life. Despite this connection to the transcendent sea, Orlando suffers trials of humanity, only to be "again sunk far beneath the present moment" when they fall victim to nostalgia (222). The poet is not immune to the power of words just because words happen to be the tool they use; this much is clear in Orlando's continual reworking of "The Oak Tree" poem. Even so, the reader's emerging sense of Orlando as a point of convergence of natural forces that exceed the expressive capacity of binary language foregrounds the layers of narcissism that occur as the self transforms into a type of "other" (Jones 157). This othering, in turn, discloses a love that is purely self-focused and is the only honest love present in Woolf's novel.

Orlando's delight in being often alone reveals love beginning and ending with the self. This fact is highlighted by the surroundings in which Orlando experiences authentic femininity. When reviewing literature alone in their London home, they feel the first pangs of labor for a pregnancy that has not previously been announced. Their thoughts become a hard-to-follow stream of consciousness revolving around exultations and natural phenomena centering on water. Their intuitive feminine nature, rather than their husband or any family member, supports Orlando while imparting a deeper understanding of the events that are happening. A boy,

described as a kingfisher until fully birthed, arrives through "the red, thick stream of life again," as Orlando comes to embody nature itself (216). Avoiding the clichéd sentiments of "Mother Nature," Orlando is never described as a mother. They are never described as pregnant and never actually give birth. Instead, "Orlando was safely delivered of a son" (217). The phrase "delivered of" harkens back to Orlando's constant need for solitude. Rather than being gifted with a son, Orlando receives the gift of having another being removed from their care. Identity, for Orlando, stems from nature and is founded in the realization that, "to inhabit is the fundamental trait of man's being" and "the self is one primordial kind of home or habitation" (Hughes 38). Orlando's locus of being has been invaded by a son and being delivered of that son frees important space in their primordial home for more of Orlando themself.

Even alone in their own body, Orlando remains crowded with the plethora of selves that leave them feeling "sick to death of this particular self" and craving the newness of another (225). In their search for a "true self," Orlando eventually realizes there is no true, underlying identity, only the currently conscious self that "wishes to be nothing but one self" (227). This revelation gives insight into why Orlando talks aloud to themself when alone: they are never truly alone. It also reveals the deeper meaning of their gender-nonspecific they/them pronouns. The search for their true identity necessitates communication with themself: "when communication is established there is nothing more to be said" (Woolf 230). As Orlando returns to the oak tree that marks their point of entry into life and nature, they trace their poem "The Oak Tree" to its roots, where its words started to grow. Now that Orlando has achieved internal balance and unity, they no longer feel the urge to share their questions and anxieties but now have answers and peace.

These events illumine Orlando's struggles with gender and identity construction, which reflect the struggles of other individuals who do not fit within binary categories. As a person who slides between ostensibly male and female identities, Orlando themself problematizes gendered expectations. Emerging from and interrogating a society that relies on patriarchal standards, Orlando understands and actively contradicts them in their performance of identity and gender. Orlando utilizes their femininity to fight the patriarchy from within in a way that "Fantomina" and Thetis is unable to do.

Conclusion

This study of the strategies that female characters use in *The Song of Achilles*, *Fantomina*, and *Orlando* in order to obtain and exercise power has left many stones unturned, especially in regard to the roles that these characters play in relation to other women. Approaching these texts from the perspective of queer theory, the queer relationships among characters and the reactions of other characters to these relationships suggests another line of inquiry into the characters' marginalization and alterity. At the same time, these central feminine characters have deep relationships with their environmental settings. Combining ecocritical and feminist analyses yields a feminist-ecocritical perspective that adds extra layers of meaning to characters' motives and exposes the intersection of gendered expectations and behaviors with environmental beliefs.

Within *The Song of Achilles*, further discussion of the roles that Thetis and Briseis play would demonstrate the complexity of their mirroring of one another, which bridges the divide between humanity and divinity. This analysis would demand a specifically feminist ecocritical lens in order to account for women's and the linguistically and mythologically feminized environment's consistent objectification and exploitation by the patriarchy. The binary opposition between sea and land, in turn, correlates to human/divine and male/female binaries. Further exploration of the complexities of specific environmental settings and their effects would help to illumine the functions and effects of Thetis' looming feminine presence in Achilles' and Patroclus' relationship and also the challenges that the two warriors' homosexual relationship poses within the heteronormative environment that they inhabit. Whereas Patroclus plays a more traditionally feminine role due to his slighter physique and his domestic role within Achilles' *oikos*, Achilles has closer ties to femininity through his mother, Thetis.

Achilles' connection to Thetis highlights his humanity, which does, however, contain elements of feminine-identified divinity. Feminine qualities associated with Thetis may either weaken or strengthen Achilles' power in mortal society. Patroclus also exhibits qualities closely identified with Thetis, raising the question of his true gender and the power dynamics of his intimate relationship with Achilles, which may challenge Thetis' position. This, in turn, complicates Patroclus' relationship to Briseis, which anticipates some of the ways in which a queer male character may align more closely with feminine characters as opposed to traditionally masculine characters. The only true footing a woman can gain in order to be understood within a patriarchal society may be the result of alliances with queer male characters; in this sense, Patroclus functions as an intermediary who allows Briseis to be understood by other Greek men. The similarities between Briseis and Achilles reinforce this concept of feminine and queer male alliances. Besides her knowledge and awareness of the bioregion, Briseis excels in storytelling, which is the avenue through which the demigod Achilles is effectively immortalized. Thetis attempts to evade or defer Achilles' inevitable mortality, but even in his death, Achilles' unmatched prowess on the battlefield immortalizes him through stories and songs, which are traditionally viewed as feminine, as Briseis' prized skills as a storyteller confirm within the narrative. These considerations suggest the close ties between queer and feminist approaches within the field of ecocriticism.

A more sustained study would complicate and revise superficial readings of *The Song of Achilles*. Since this thesis's main argument involves Thetis and Briseis, it does not address the many subplots involving queer characters. One such subplot involves Chiron and his specific territory. Thetis makes a visit to Chiron's cave, which is located in the most remote location from the sea in which she appears. Her intimate connection to nature and her existence as an extension

of the sea can be more clearly seen in this setting, when she is further distanced from the sea. The entirety of the woodland quiets when Thetis visits Chiron's cave, where Achilles and Patroclus have come to train and deepen their relationship. This scene offers an opportunity to engage with basic ecocritical theory while also highlighting queer connections, since this remote setting is where Patroclus and Achilles elevate their relationship to a more intimate level and Patroclus emerges as an effeminate character who replaces Thetis in Achilles' life.

The relationship between a character's isolation and the ecology is likewise evident in *Orlando*. Orlando's poignant moments of solitude often tie to nature through water, recalling Thetis' connection with the sea. A typical moment occurs when Orlando interacts with Queen Elizabeth I as a young boy, kneeling before this figure of feminine power and autonomy in order "to offer a bowl of rose water" with his head bowed so low "he saw no more of her than her ringed hand in water" (17). In this scene, Orlando exists alone with this feminine hand adorned in fine jewels that is submerged in fragrant water, which inspires an idea of femininity being cleansed and celebrated by immersion in a body of water. *Orlando*'s strong implication that feminine power increases in proximity to water recalls Thetis' aqueous divinity; so, too, "Fantomina"'s femininity is confirmed when her water breaks as she is struck with a "terrible Shock of Nature" that shatters the illusion of propriety that her noble status has allowed her to sustain as a socialite at a ball (288). Orlando's moments of introspection and sentimentality are likewise linked to bodies of water, tears, and the rain.

The prioritization of ecological over social contexts is a running theme in each human interaction in *The Song of Achilles*. Since the Myrmidons' camp is closest to different types of vegetation, Briseis is able to help Patroclus acquire knowledge about the distinctive aspects of nature in this foreign land. Since Briseis has spent her life near Troy, she knows "all its secrets,

just as Chiron had…She had even begun to teach me the native names of the plants and trees" (244). Chiron is a source of ecological knowledge and awareness, and Patroclus' comparison of Briseis to Chiron places her at a similar level of importance and knowledge, albeit in a different way. Briseis reminds Patroclus of Chiron, who taught him as he became a physician, and she shows him how to work with "dozens of herbs that brought the centaur's patient fingers back to me" (248). Because Patroclus is a genderqueer character, an effeminate man who is excluded from the stereotypical masculine roles in a patriarchal society, he is able to become Briseis' apprentice and student, learning from her about the ecosystems of the Trojan territory. This raises his status from being Achilles' companion to being an integral member of the Greek army as their physician. The relationship between Patroclus and Briseis illustrates how queer and feminine experiences may align. It also positions the queer and the feminine in environmental proximity, since the Greek camp, which Patroclus' genderqueer identity and his queer relationship to Achilles render a queer space, is situated beside the sea, the site and source of Thetis's feminine power and of Thalassa's primal divinity.

Further study might also focus on Thetis' and Briseis' relationships to Achilles. Neither character is ever seen completely alone with Achilles. When viewed in the context of this thesis's larger argument, an analysis of these relationships would help to develop an understanding of Achilles as a liminal character positioned between femininity and masculinity, as well as between humanity and divinity; these liminal qualities also invite comparison of Achilles to Orlando, whose gender-fluid attributes, like the genderqueer effeminacy of Patroclus, fall under the umbrella of "mestizaje" that Anzaldúa develops as part of her analysis of borderlands as fruitful spaces for outliers in binaries. This discussion would work well with the

arguments presented by Chodorow in interpreting Achilles' complex version of masculinity in contrast to the more powerful feminine authority of his mother, Thetis.

A deeper look into Achilles' and Patroclus' relationship would open a window to the hierarchies present in the family unit and the ways they relate to larger social structures within the novelistic universe of *The Song of Achilles*. Given the power dynamics of the couple sharing a bed and the same living space, it would be interesting to explore further the notoriety and respect as an ideal masculine figure given to Achilles by other male warriors. The central focus on environmental and ecological space would provide an entry point to create an ecocritical focus, and a full discussion of the romantic relationship of Achilles and Patroclus could be illumined by more queer theory, especially in regard to the recognition and begrudging acceptance that other male soldiers accord the queer couple because they excel in other forms of masculine social performance, such as being the best warrior or physician.

An expanded analysis of *Fantomina* from the perspective of gender studies might explore the reasons why "Fantomina"'s disguises are so easily accepted by Beauplaisir, which emphasizes the one-dimensionality of femininity as it is perceived from a male perspective. "Fantomina" chooses to perform male-constructed stereotypes—the sex-worker, the innocent country maid, the sensuous widow, and the mysterious "princess"—because she understands men's perspective on women. Since women are often seen in terms of the role they play in relation to men rather than as autonomous individuals, she continually plays the role of a prospective lover, which creates a continuity among her personae, as those personae are understood from a male perspective. In this respect, "Fantomina" is curating her own relationship with femininity, variously imagined, rather than with any man. She centers herself in a queer space by continually exchanging different forms of performative femininity and never

performing a masculine role or seeking affirmation of her power in masculine terms from Beauplaisir. She uses her disguises as an opportunity to portray feminine roles to which she did not previously have access due to the restrictions associated with her elevated socio-economic position. In this way, "Fantomina" creates an "uncanny valley" effect through her palpably flimsy, even transparent disguises while playing into the patriarchal generalization that "female nature" is the same in every woman regardless of her actual identity or character.

This effect of "Fantomina"'s disguises contributes to the novel's larger argument about how women are consistently dehumanized and infantilized. Even while women, physically, are obviously human, the consistent objectification they experience because of the male gaze that is perpetuated by the patriarchy suggests a reason why "Fantomina"'s disguises appear successful. If all men see when they look at women is a female-shaped object, women's identities as individuals are never considered, which is why Beauplaisir never discovers or even questions "Fantomina"'s true identity. The queer fluidity of her persona performances is possible because her identity exists, in the male gaze, solely as a generalized form of femininity. If the patriarchy further blurs the lines of her identity with the societal expectations set for women, "Fantomina"'s exile to a French Convent raises important additional questions.

Before being exiled, "Fantomina" gives birth to a daughter who is taken away from her before she is sent away, with both decisions made by her mother. In this moment, her roles as socialite, lover, daughter, and new mother are stripped from her and replaced by her new role as a nun. Recalling "Fantomina"'s original intentions and the curiosity that prompted her to craft her personae, the attentive reader may wonder what interest "Fantomina" may take in the women who will surround her in this new setting. She has already experienced a queerness by changing her identity through a series of performances; once removed from the direct male gaze of the

patriarchy, she will be in an environment that will afford her an opportunity to experiment with her sexuality, especially when her connections to female identity through her personae, her mother, and her daughter have been broken. In the convent, she will gain a new role and a new family with her fellow nuns as sisters, exchanging a heteronormative environment for a homosocial one.

Fantomina also engages the trope of passing from "civilization" through a "wilderness" and back to "civilization." The character "Fantomina" is initially unhappy and isolated within society, so she chooses to leave and experience the foreign mystique of an unknown, "wild" setting; only after living within an unfamiliar environment does she return to society as a changed individual. This trope enforces the importance of physical location and travel, especially since "Fantomina" must traverse the channel between England and France to begin the new life that waits for her in the French convent. "Fantomina"'s journey by boat across a body of water to reach this new community of women strongly parallels events in both *The Song of Achilles* and *Orlando*. Achilles escapes across the sea to the island of Scyros at Thetis' urging and disguises himself as a female dancer among Deidameia's woman in an attempt to mask his masculine identity and escape his prophesized future. When Orlando changes genders and begins performing as a woman, they dress as an English noblewoman and board a ship bound for England to embrace their newfound femininity in their original English community. Each of these scenes foregrounds heightened moments of femininity in conjunction with the immersive quality of being within or traversing a body of water. Further discussion would explore the reasons why being immersed in water symbolizes being immersed in femininity, much as the images of birth or rebirth in these scenes mark pivotal character and plot developments.

Confronting the impending actuality of giving birth, “Fantomina” tries to retain her place within society by using a flimsy deception that cannot succeed after she becomes pregnant. When her pregnancy is discovered, she is forced into a worse position than if she had just gone “into the Country, where her Mother design’d to send her, and from whence she intended to make her escape to some Place where she might be delivered with Secrecy” (287). Because “Fantomina” does not voluntarily choose to leave the Town and the social world it represents, her mother makes the decision for her, and she must travel to a French convent where she is subjected to a potentially stricter form of patriarchal control. Considering “the church’s policies dictated that the only way women could transcend their nature and pursue the path to spiritual perfection was through sexual renunciation,” “Fantomina” will be isolated from any opportunity to repeat the decisions and actions that involved seducing Beauplaisir and giving birth to a daughter (Choudhury 13). Once cut off from her experiences with heteronormative relationships, however, the opportunity may arise for her to explore her sexuality within the exclusively feminine space inside the convent. In this setting, the potential for her sexuality to verge into the queer sphere is likely to increase. The person with the most power at her disposal in the convent will be the Mother Superior, so in a familial role switch, “Fantomina” will exchange her absent mother for a Mother Superior who will closely supervise and guide her within the convent. Without access to her performative repertoire of femininity, “Fantomina” will likely search for a new identity in other sources including the Mother Superior and her sister nuns.

The role that motherhood plays for “Fantomina” connects her to both Thetis and Orlando, albeit in different ways. Whereas Thetis and Orlando are mothers of sons, “Fantomina” gives birth to a daughter. Thetis watches Achilles grow up and eventually die, while Orlando’s son is safely delivered and they are able to return to their estate in England together; “Fantomina”

experiences an unwanted pregnancy and gives birth to her daughter in a stressful situation, with her mother interrogating her and Beauplaisir arriving to bear witness to her shame. Not only does Beauplaisir deny connection with "Fantomina," but he denies his daughter as well: "if she would commit the new-born Lady to his Care, he would discharge it faithfully" (290). The word "discharge" implies a transactional quality reminiscent of the way in which women are consistently perceived and treated as commodities and possessions within the patriarchy. Their newborn daughter is already being objectified like every woman and, even worse, the agent of this objectification is her own father. Not only does Beauplaisir view his daughter as a commodity, but she is an unwanted responsibility and possession that he does not care to own. He wishes to discharge her to a foster family and to bribe her and her foster family with an allowance, like the eighteenth-century version of child support. In this indirect way, he acknowledges his role as her father but only so he may have nothing to do with his daughter beyond mere financial support.

The transactional socio-economic values that Beauplaisir espouses in this case resonate, to a greater or lesser degree, in all three texts. Thetis exists outside of human society and therefore outside of human economic practices and systems; Peleus is able, as a king, to support Achilles' financially, but Thetis supports her son emotionally and mentally in ways that "Fantomina" is denied the opportunity to do for her unnamed daughter. Orlando retains their socio-economic status across gender identities and amid the vicissitudes of English history from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries but returns to their estate with their son but without their partner, the sea captain Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, after they gave birth alone. Shelmerdine, who is gender-fluid like Orlando and who also slip out of the net of time, participates with Orlando in a generative process that, unlike Thetis' or "Fantomina"'s

pregnancies, does not intrude upon or compromise Orlando's individuality or essential autonomy. Further investigation of their complex relationship would invoke both queer and gender theory in order to show how their shared refusal to conform to—or their mutual inability to fulfill—capitalistic and heteronormative social expectations inform Woolf's critique of those norms and of the power dynamics that constrain and distort both individuals' lives and interpersonal relationships.

Juxtaposing *The Song of Achilles*, *Fantomina*, and *Orlando* reveals a plethora of ways that woman are dehumanized through commodification, objectification, and infantilization. This continuing process of dehumanization creates a power imbalance that benefits the patriarchy, even as it raises significant questions about its construction. The patriarchy relies on the elaboration and enforcement of an exclusively—and coercively—binary model of gender, but women must exist first as people before they can be scripted into—or resist being scripted into—the roles that the patriarchy assigns them. If, like Orlando, individuals begin to reject binary models of gender, the patriarchy will no longer be able to function as it has. Every individual who does not conform to heteronormative expectations engages in an act that subverts traditional societal values and expectations, and the cumulative force of multiple such subversions will eventually splinter and break down the entire system. The act of creating and inhabiting a category outside of the normative model of gendered identity exposes both the contingency and the limitations of that model and opens more opportunities for everyone. Refusing to acknowledge and operate within the confines of binary values, as each of the characters discussed in this thesis does, provides an entry point to achieve a power that is rooted neither in masculinity nor in femininity but rather in the unique individuality of each subject.

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