

# **ORLANDO: WOOLF'S CONCEPT OF ANDROGYNY SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF BAKHTIN'S GROTESQUE**

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**Abstract:** Woolf's *Orlando* is the only novel in which the author creates real physical androgynous characters to shatter the stability of being, sex and gender – rigid backbones of patriarchy – by inserting her characters, namely Orlando, Archduchess and Sasha, into a state of physical, mental and sexual ambivalence. This article analyses the novel's androgynous characters in terms of mind, body and sexuality and claims that the aim to destabilise traditional notions of individualism and the image of Woolf's concept of androgyny in *Orlando* are similar to those of Bakhtin's notion of grotesque, which is also based on the idea of instability and constant change.

**Keywords:** Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, Bakhtin, androgyny, grotesque

## **INTRODUCTION: ANDROGYNY AND THE GROTESQUE**

*Orlando* (1928) can be read as Virginia Woolf's reaction against stabilized notions of being, sex and gender, which have been regarded as the main cornerstones of patriarchal society. Woolf, the name of whom Rado finds "virtually synonymous" with the term androgyny (2000, 138), underlines the sense of continuous change and ambivalence in her characters by throwing them into the abyss of uncertainty – in Nietzschean terms – in terms of their gender and sex. This is precisely what Woolf means when she states in *A Room of One's Own* – "the theory of androgyny" (Restuccia 1985, 254) – that an author should incorporate both "man and woman part of the brain" (1992, 128).

Androgyny is a term used for the presence of both sexes – Greek *andr* (male) and *gyne* (female) – in one body. As Robert Kimbrough states, the "androgynous vision is the human desire to reach a sense of human wholeness" (1990, 17), the state which was valid when "all generation was a unisexual operation" before human beings inherited

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“sub-division into sex, female and male” (1990, 15). It stands for the desire to return to the state when a human being could make use of her/his complete set of abilities rather than eliminating some of them because of the socially constructed gender roles.

When androgyny is inserted into the feminist context, it is enriched in meaning as seen in Woolf’s *Orlando*. As Rado states, Woolf’s use of the androgynous theme makes her be “labelled the subversive, even deconstructive, feminist” (2000, 139). Indeed, feminist writers like Judith Butler and Donna Haraway also stress the fluidity of the female body without stressing the notion of androgyny. These post-structuralist feminist critics are concerned with “the irreducible interplay of ... physicality which posits a body in process, never fixed or solid, but always multiple and fluid” (Shildrick and Price 1999, 6).

Woolf’s interest in fluid sex and gender can be noticed in her personal experience, too. Her performance in the Dreadnought Hoax was based on the role of a man from an Abyssinian royal delegation. “She was a woman disguised as a man but in garments that suggested female rather than male dress. The mediating factor that made this ambiguity possible was the simultaneous crossing of gender and of race” (Kennard 1996, 152). Woolf’s appearance in front of a foreign group of people in a kind of blurred individual preference makes her transcend the normative separation of genders, which seems to focus on an escape from the frames imposed by society. “Cross-dressing ... has the effect of carnivalizing political and cultural power and thus of undermining it” (Kennard 1996, 152). In other words, by creating a doubtful image, Woolf pronounces her challenge against officialdom and expresses her desire to take part in a game.

Mikhail Bakhtin, a theorist of the body and its flexible nature, which he mainly expresses in his ideas on carnival, sees the notion of grotesque as “a phenomenon in transformation” (1984, 24). The grotesque, which Bakhtin mainly associates with the body, is an image of becoming and change. Grotesque image of the body “is an active subject, an event-making agent” (Jung 1998, 98). It is the reflection of life which negates completeness and stability mainly through its two seminal features. First, the material bodily principle of grotesque realism is “festive,” “cosmic, social,” which abhors and absolutely rejects “private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life”; it represents all people and links these people to the whole world (1984, 26). As Jung states, “the [grotesque] body is the initial insertion of the self into the world of others, other bodies” (1998, 97). Second,

Bakhtinian bodily principle of grotesque realism is growth and renewal, “represent[ing] the body as unbounded, in transformation” (Dentith 1995, 80). For Bakhtin, the images of the body express change, “fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance” (1984, 19). Therefore, as Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan states, Bakhtin cannot accept the idea that the self can draw the “boundary lines of its territory” (2013, 30); Bakhtin’s “human subject” is “always in the process of becoming, taking the experience of the concrete” (2013, 25).

Similar to the concept of androgyny, that stresses the fluidity of gender and sex, the grotesque depicts an image of a constantly changing body which does not have rigid boundaries. Bakhtin, indeed, mentions the theme of androgyny, which was popular in Rabelais’ time, and links it to grotesque imagery in Rabelais’s novel, in which Gargantua’s hat is described as follows: “It portrayed a man’s body with two heads facing one another, four arms, four feet, a pair of arses and a brace of sexual organs, male and female” (qtd. in 1984, 323). Thus, Bakhtin mentions the theme of androgyny as a grotesque duality suggesting profound ambivalence.

### ORLANDO

*Orlando*, a fictional biography of Orlando, is narrated by an androgynous narrator, who, as Woolf propagates in *A Room of One’s Own*, avoids writing only from the point of view of one gender because “a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine” (1992, 128). The narrator disrupts conventions of biography writing by destroying its limits and suggesting the fluidity of content by at the same time constructing an analogy between the destruction of the limits of gender and sex. In fact, biography, “traditionally masculine gender” is highly conscious of gender hierarchies because it is “dedicated to chronicling and often celebrating masculine achievements, whether they be the achievements of a nation or an individual” (Harrison 1997, 72). And by challenging such genre conventions, *Orlando*’s narrator shatters gender and sex hierarchies and boundaries by bringing forth the idea of androgyny; a person embraces both male and female categories. By disrupting the conventions of biography writing, or, in other words, by shattering the male walls of gender and sex isolation, the narrator makes the female world enter the world of males. As a result, a text about the biography of an “extra-ordinary person, a particular individual who in some

manner did something deemed noteworthy by the conventional canons of significance” (Zinsser 2009, 44) becomes a playground haunted by the sense of uncertainty as “the study of great or exceptional people” which “makes women marginal” becomes the study of “women who lead predominantly domestic lives” (Caine 1994, 250).

Indeed, feminists started to revise biography writing in the 1980s because as Zinsser states, they wanted “to chronicle the lives of all women” (2009, 43) including those who have been systematically inferiorised by the masculine authority. “Women’s history has taken as two of its primary goals the rescuing of women’s lives from obscurity and the redefinition of history itself, so that the private and domestic worlds of women ceased to be seen as historically irrelevant” (Caine 1994, 250).

Not having the chance to live up until this point in the 80s Woolf “did not believe in biography at all. All her working life she had rejected biography as a form” (Mephram 1991, 174). In her essay “The New Biography” (1927), therefore, Woolf states that it is easier for the biographers to describe the “truth in its hardest, most obdurate form” as it is found in the “British Museum” because “the true life” is easily visible in comparison with the personality that “meanders darkly and obscurely through the hidden channels of the soul” (2009, 95). In other words, Woolf thinks that the truth in its hardest form is not what should be included in biography writing.

Through *Orlando*, Woolf shows what is biography writing in her opinion and she starts by eliminating gender and sex boundaries. Orlando’s life cannot be inserted into the context of gendered activities as she is neither a woman only nor a man only. Moreover, Orlando’s biographer is free to focus on what goes on in the soul of the character and to mock conventional biography writing for which Orlando’s detailed face description would mean nothing.

What is more irritating than to see one’s subject, ... slipping out of one’s grasp altogether and indulging – witness her sighs and gasps, her flushing, her palings, her eyes now bright as lamps, now haggard as dawns – what is more humiliating than to see all this dumb show of emotion and excitement gone through before our eyes when we know that what causes it – thought and imagination – are of no importance whatsoever. (2003, 132)

The narrator adds: “Would, indeed, that a pin had dropped! That would have been life of a kind” (2003, 132). However, “thinking is precisely what Orlando is doing now” (2003, 132). So by choosing to

write about “thinking” Orlando, the biographer disrupts the conventional system of biography writing and as Booker states, the novel is a “parody of ... traditional male authoritarian form, the scholarly biography” (1991, 171).

If *Orlando* is a writing of an androgynous mind, Mr A' writing in *A Room of One's Own* is performed only by “a male side” of the brain (1992, 132) according to Woolf. It lacks a sense of balance. Woolf feels Mr A's urge to establish masculine superiority in his writing; “after reading a chapter or two a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter ‘I’” (1992, 130). According to Woolf, Mr A's way of writing is an example of the exclusion of the woman part of the brain. Woolf adds that “men” write “only with the male side of their brains,” which makes it “a mistake for a woman to read” because “she will inevitably look for something that she will not find” (1992, 132). In brief, Woolf holds that it is “fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly” (1992, 136), just like Bakhtinian image of the grotesque, which embraces the world to destroy the tendency towards isolation. For Bakhtin, grotesque is the reflection of “a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life” (1984, 62). Thus, to come back to Woolf, an author should forget his/her sex and gender and focus on the representation of a life in its wholeness. “Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated” (1992, 136). As a result, this invitation to collect feminine and masculine parts of the brain in Woolf's discourse is similar to what Bakhtin calls the “cosmic” and “festive” grotesque realism; an image that embraces everything rather than excluding something.

Orlando him/herself is an androgynous individual. His/her androgynous mind constitutes a quite substantial context of the novel. As a boy of sixteen, while Orlando vows to be like his father or a grandfather, who “had struck [heads] from the shoulders” of Pagans “in the barbarian fields of Africa” (2003, 5), he, at the same time becomes “exalted” by sights of birds and trees (2003, 6). So while tendencies to violence tend to dominate his soul he can be romantically charged. As a result, “all these sights, and the garden sounds too, the hammer beating, the wood chopping, began that riot and confusion of the passions and emotions” in Orlando (2003, 6). The biographer observes the uncategorisable mind of the protagonist which he/she

calls “roomy” (2003, 6). It is roomy enough to accommodate the wealth of life, of which Woolf mentions in *A Room of One’s Own*; and this is what “every good biographer detests” (2003, 6). The narrator’s irony in this regard underlines once more the fact that Orlando’s biography is not a conventional one.

Orlando’s confusion of feelings and passions, the projection of an androgynous mind, does not fade away when Orlando physically becomes a woman. Indeed, Orlando does not reveal “any signs of discomposure” (2003, 67) when she/he sees her/himself in the mirror. The narrator’s attitude towards Orlando’s change of sex deserves attention. Although Orlando is introduced as a woman in a scene where the sex change takes place, the biographer continues using masculine pronouns. “Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, ... and went, presumably, to his bath” (2003, 67). Kaivola stresses the biographer’s insistence on the idea that subjectivity is not as limited as is the language that is used to delineate it: “[T]he use of the masculine pronoun to describe a biological woman call[s] the singularity of Orlando’s identity to question implying that human subjectivity is not reducible to a non-contradictory whole or consistently expressive of the sexed body” (1999, 235). Indeed, the biographer makes her/his point clear later on in the novel. “Different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above” (2003, 92-93). And as Kaivola states, Woolf generalizes the androgynous state to all humanity. “Despite the more fantastical aspects of Orlando’s experience, then, Woolf asserts that we are all more like Orlando than we might think” (1999, 235).

Orlando awakes as a woman after several days’ sleep. “He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, ... we have no choice left but to confess – he was a woman” (2003, 67). Although Orlando’s naked body reveals the vital consequences of the metamorphosis, he/she “remained precisely as he had been” (2003, 67), which refers to his unchanged inner world. “The change of sex, though it altered their [Orlando the woman and Orlando the man] future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same” (2003, 67). The outward manifestation of Orlando’s change, her physical appearance and her clothes, do not confound the minds of the others

either. Orlando's "retinue of servants" greet her just with a slight appreciation of the change, devoid of an awareness that something extraordinary has happened. "No one showed an instant's suspicion that Orlando was not the Orlando they had known" (2003, 83). For them, both Orlando a man, and Orlando a woman "were as like as two peaches on one branch" (2003, 83). The servants' attitude is that of absolute awareness of the existence of two Orlandos: male and female. Mrs Grimsditch, Orlando's housekeeper, even states that "she had always had her suspicions (here she nodded her head very mysteriously), which it was no surprise to her (here she nodded her head very knowingly)" (2003, 83).

What should be underlined is that Orlando is not an image with two faces each of which takes its place on one side of a medallion. Orlando's androgynous subjectivity is what Bakhtin delineates as grotesque realism; the Bakhtinian grotesque "represents the body as unbounded, in transformation" (Dentith 1995, 80). It is what seems fantastic, exaggerated and extraordinary if seen from a conventional point of view. Orlando is a character who seems to be male but at the same time reveals feminine features. In this way, Orlando negates the sense of gender difference.

Indeed, if Orlando's identity is androgynous, that androgyny is mobile, not static: presenting not a smooth synthesis of oppositions but a more chaotic hermaphroditic 'intermix,' Orlando's gender – and her desires – constantly change. Fluid and dynamic, Orlando both responds to and eludes gender imperatives and sexual codes that shape Western culture from the Renaissance to the early years of the twentieth century. (Kaivola 1999, 235)

Neither the feminine gender nor the masculine one predominates in Orlando; she/he rejects gender categories by creating an androgynous being. Orlando renders problematic the concept of gender altogether. "Whether, then, Orlando was most man or woman, it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided" (2003, 93).

Orlando's mind is depicted as something causing wealth of experience; which once more brings him/her close to the grotesque image. As Bakhtin states, "One of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born" (1984, 26). Grotesque image involves the whole life, from birth to death, signifying the wealth of experience, change and life; the constant transformative nature of the grotesque image, and Orlando in

particular, suggests the resistance to the fixed and stable image. There is always that urge to depict something that has warmth of existence and flow of life. This is precisely what Woolf wants to underline in her characters in *Orlando*. Flying back and forth from one sex to another is a vital factor causing greatness of vision of the world; “for [Orlando] sex changed far more frequently than those who have worn only one set of clothing can conceive; ... the pleasures of life were increased and its experiences multiplied. [She] enjoyed the love of both sexes equally” (2003, 108). Woolf makes her protagonist experience the “vastness and variety of the world” (1992, 114). In fact, besides the richness of the outer world, Orlando experiences the richness of the inner world as she/he is seen to hold a multiplicity of selves. “Then she called hesitatingly, as if the person she wanted might not be there, ‘Orlando?’ For if there are (at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once, how many different people are there not – Heaven help us – all having lodgement at one time or another in the human spirit?” (2003, 152)

Orlando’s androgynous body is also emphasised in the novel. At the beginning of the novel, when Orlando is a boy of sixteen, there is an ambiguity about his appearance. “He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it – was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters” (2003, 5). The narrator/biographer feels the urge to remind the reader that Orlando is a boy because his clothes seem to disguise his sex. Ryan states that such an urge makes the narrator/biographer challenge the stability of the male/female binary (2013, 103). In this way, the narrator/biographer unsettles the sharp distinctions between sex and gender at the onset of the novel. Orlando’s clothes that suggest a feminine image and his acts that suggest violence present a scene pregnant with grotesque meaning as an image of a feminine body produces an image of a masculine act and vice versa. The continuous performance of the same act of slicing in this scene suggests perpetual transformation of one image into the other: masculine into the feminine and vice versa. As Bakhtin states, the “grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis” (1984, 24). Similar to Bakhtin’s focus on the images that resist stability and the grotesque’s “ambivalence” as its “indispensable trait” (1984, 24), Orlando’s unidentifiable physical categories are stressed and brought to the foreground.

Orlando's physical appearance is described in a carnivalesque manner because the narrator/biographer plays with the conventional ways of describing a character. When Orlando is a boy he is described in a way through which women are traditionally described. The most striking feature which is continuously mentioned by the narrator about Orlando is his "shapely" legs (2003, 5). As Rosenman states, "women, not men, were appreciated for their shapely legs" (1989, 642). Then, the biographer goes on: "The red of the cheeks was covered with peach down; ... he had eyes like drenched violets, ... and a brow like the swelling of a marble dome" (2003, 6). Orlando is like a grotesque image because he has both manly and womanly features. Indeed, while the narrative starts with the narrator's description of violence Orlando demonstrates, it smoothly moves on to the description of Orlando's tender legs and face. As Kaivola states, the biographer, by doing so, "calls his masculinity into question" (1999, 252).

As Maggie Humm pinpoints, Woolf's "revisions of ... patriarchal, conservative sexuality are most explicit in *Orlando*" (1986, 133). The sexuality of the characters in *Orlando* is important evidence of their androgyny. The characters' sexual behaviour in the novel does not fit into heteronormative standards of sexuality according to which, as Alexandra Howson claims, "attraction to the opposite sex (heterosexuality) is the default sexuality attributed to people" (2013, 53). The novel's approach to sexuality problematizes the neat division of human beings into two opposite sexes. "The 'natural attitude' towards sex and gender in the West assumes that people belong to one of the two possible distinct categories determined on the basis of given biological and anatomical characteristics (that is, *either* male *or* female, *either* masculine *or* feminine)" (Howson 2013, 53).

Having an androgynous sexuality, Orlando tends to confuse the readers in terms of his sexual preferences. His first encounter with the Russian Princess Marousha Stanilovska Dagmar Natasha Iliana Romanovitch, whom Orlando calls Sasha, takes place when Orlando is a young man. Indeed, the name Orlando gives to the Russian girl is usually used as a male name in Russian, which, according to Booker, emphasizes "that Sasha's gender is highly uncertain" (1991, 182). Orlando's first seeing her is described as a series of uncertainties about Sasha's sex. Orlando sees "a figure, which, whether boy's or woman's, for the loose tunic and trousers of the Russian fashion served to disguise the sex, filled him with the highest curiosity" (2003, 17). Orlando cannot identify Sasha's sex at first and although Orlando

thinks Sasha is a boy, he still feels attracted to her. “When the boy, for alas, a boy it must be – no woman could skate with such speed and vigour – swept almost on tiptoe past him, Orlando was ready to tear his hair with vexation that the person was of his own sex” (2003, 17). The narrator’s description of Sasha’s physical appearance does not help to define her sex; her sex is ambivalent for the reader. “The person, whatever the name or sex, was about middle height, very slenderly fashioned” (2003, 17). What is more, the biographer focuses more on Sasha’s seductiveness rather than on trying to understand her sex. “But these details [about Sasha] were obscured by the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from the whole person” (2003, 17). Sasha’s seductiveness, according to Rado, “consists not in her sexual body but in her transcendence of conventional categories of identity” (2000, 162). Sasha attracts Orlando precisely by her ambivalence of sexual identity and this intensifies the idea that Orlando is androgynous. When Orlando becomes a woman, her passion towards Sasha does not change. She understands that “it was still a woman she loved” (2003, 79). Orlando even feels the development of her feelings to Sasha because of her understanding of Sasha’s emotions. Orlando’s being a woman just “quicken[s] and deepen[s] those feelings which she had had as a man” (2003, 79).

Orlando’s androgynous subjectivity is also revealed through her/his sexuality with reference to the Archduchess/Archduke Harriet/Harry Griselda of Finster-Aahorn and Scandop-Boom in the Roumanian territory. When Orlando meets the Archduchess/Archduke Harriet/Harry, a man disguised as a woman, Orlando cannot help being attracted to her: he becomes “suddenly and violently overcome by passion of some sort” (2003, 56). It is true that Orlando is not aware of the Archduchess/Archduke’s real sex; he thinks the Archduchess/Archduke is a woman and when the latter approaches Orlando, there is an interaction of passion between them. Orlando is “sexually aroused and thus sexually ‘exposed’” (Rado 2000, 163). The scene is the manifestation of the fluidity of genders and the possibility of mutual attraction between people regardless of their sexes.

Orlando’s androgyny is also seen in her tendency to wear male clothes when she is a woman. According to Bakhtin, people’s change from men to women and vice versa is a carnivalesque image because carnivals are the time of negation of the existing order. And changing from men into women during carnivals is the concrete demonstration of this negation. “Negation in popular-festive imagery has never an

abstract logical character. It is always something obvious, tangible” (1984, 410). Similarly, Woolf’s making Orlando a woman masquerade as a man is her negation of the fixity of sexual identity. As Minow-Pinkney claims, “[d]isguise’ is a play with the boundary between seeming and being, blurring their sharp distinction and opening up a space of heterogeneity within unitary being” (1987, 132). And the critic adds that “recurrent disguises are another enactment of the impossible concept of androgyny, a literal realisation of the heterogeneity of sexuality by metonymical movement” (Minow-Pinkney 1987, 132). Woolf’s constant use of the theme of disguise and masquerade in her novel, according to Pawlowski, is her desire to “challenge society’s assumption about sexuality” (2003, xiii).

During such a masquerade, Orlando meets Nell, a prostitute, and becomes sexually attracted although she is a woman. “To feel her hanging lightly yet like a suppliant on her arm, roused in Orlando all the feelings which become a man” (2003, 106). Furthermore, when Orlando meets Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, who becomes her husband, she realizes that he, too, has both sexes in him. “‘You’re a woman, Shel!’ she cried. ‘You’re a man, Orlando!’ he cried” (2003, 124). The novel stresses sexuality as a force inevitably transgressing gender boundaries. It foregrounds the normalcy of such a transgression and subverts the heteronormative understanding of the divisions between genders. In this vein, the marriage of Orlando and Shel is not a conventional one. “Marriage as it had existed through the ages, with the male and female joining but not changing their preordained images, fails in Virginia Woolf’s ideal androgynous world” (Heilbrun 1973, 163). As Minow-Pinkney states, when Orlando and Shel recognize each other as androgynous beings, they are not in disguise; disguise “is no longer necessary: even without it Orlando recognises a woman in Shel, Shel a man in Orlando. They reject an apparent unitariness of sex that is only held in place by clothes as signifying systems” (1987, 132).

The Archduchess/Archduke, another androgynous character, presents an ambivalent/grotesque body. Being a man, the Archduke appears in front of Orlando as a lady, whose behaviour seems not to fit into a lady’s. “Any other woman thus caught in a Lord’s private grounds would have been afraid; any other woman with that face, headdress, and aspect would have thrown her mantilla across her shoulders to hide it” (2003, 55). Besides his/her behaviour that suggests gender ambivalence, the Archduchess/Archduke is portrayed in a grotesque manner by being associated with an animal. Indeed, Lisa

Rado claims that the Archduchess has a “grotesque physique” (2000, 163).

For this lady resembled nothing so much as a hare; a hare startled, but obdurate; a hare whose timidity is overcome by an immense and foolish audacity; a hare that sits upright and glowers at its pursuer with great, bulging eyes; with ears erect but quivering, with nose pointed, but twitching. This hare, moreover, was six feet high and wore a headdress into the bargain of some antiquated kind which made her look still taller. (2003, 55)

Moreover, Orlando even doubts her integrity as a sane human being assigning the attributes of her behaviour to a lunatic. She has “such a cackle of nervous laughter, so much tee-heeing and haw-hawing that Orlando thought she must have escaped from a lunatic asylum” (2003, 55). According to Bakhtin, juxtaposition of human and animal characteristics is a grotesque image (1984, 316). The body “is blended with the world, with animals, with objects” (1984, 27). Bakhtin stresses the importance of the grotesque body’s merging with the rest of the world. Bringing animal and human characteristics into one image is a way to erase the boundaries between a separate human body and nature. Indeed, the phrase “bulging eyes” in Woolf’s extract above is seen in Bakhtin’s discussion of the grotesque body; when Bakhtin states that some of the bodily parts link the body to “the world outside,” he mentions eyes as the organs that display this link between the body and the world – “the bulging eyes manifest a purely bodily tension” (1984, 317). Moreover, Bakhtin stresses the importance of a nose as a link between the body and the world. He states that the nose “play[s] the most important part in the grotesque image of the body” (1984, 316). Bakhtin adds that a nose “always symbolizes the phallus” (1984, 316). It suggests Bakhtin’s discussion of the notion of degradation in grotesque imagery. “To degrade ... means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs” (1984, 21). So associating a nose with phallus is the degradation of the head (a nose being a part of the head) an organ usually associated with something high, spiritual. Thus, the Archduke’s pointed nose in Woolf’s extract can be associated with phallus. What is more, this nose twitches, which can be seen as phallus which is not certain of itself. In this way, the image of Harriet/Harry in Woolf’s extract can be seen as a grotesque image and can be read as a manifestation of an androgynous character. She/he is resembled to an animal, is linked to the outside world through bulging eyes and a

twitching nose. And the twitching nose symbolizes her/his transgression of gender-specific elements.

The Archduchess/Archduke's sexuality is also ambivalent. Normally, the Archduchess/Archduke is a man, the Archduke Harry, who falls in love with Orlando although he knows that Orlando is a man: "he had seen a portrait of Orlando and fallen hopelessly in love with him" (2003, 88). Therefore, he disguises as a woman and presents herself/himself to Orlando as the Archduchess Harriet. Yet, Orlando escapes him/her and goes to Constantinople. When Orlando becomes a woman and comes back, the Archduchess/Archduke comes to Orlando's mansion again and reveals himself as a man. When Orlando "turned to present the Archduchess with the salver ... in her place stood a tall gentleman in black" (2003, 87). The Archduke's love and passion for Orlando does not cease. He follows Orlando everywhere she goes and he even rescues her once from the hands of the mob and "tradesmen's wives" who are aware of the fact that "ladies are not supposed to walk in public places alone" and try to bother her (2003, 94). The Archduke saves her and presents her a jewel as a sign of his proposal (2003, 94). The Archduchess/Archduke's passion towards Orlando transgresses the gender boundary and disregards the sex binary. Moreover, he/she disregards the age boundary, too, because he/she is "his [Orlando's] elder by many years" (2003, 56).

By proposing an androgynous subjectivity, which unsettles the notions of fixed sex and gender, Woolf attacks patriarchal definitions of "femininity." "[A]ndrogyny offered Woolf a way of rejecting biological determinism and undoing the privileging of the masculine over the feminine" (Rosenman 1989, 647). In this way, Woolf shatters in her fictional universe the gender hierarchies according to which women are subordinate to men. "In Orlando's multifaceted, multigendered identity, Woolf dismantles the masculine-self/feminine-other hierarchy and resists a phallogocentric insistence on identity as static and unitary" (Harrison 1997, 62). *Orlando* makes the reader "redefine identity as mobile" and "mutable" (Haines-Wright 1996, 178).

Nancy Topping Bazin and Alma Freeman argue that androgyny is an important concept for the feminist movement because it plays a great role in the process of "the elimination of sex roles and the overthrow of the current male structures and values" (1974, 185). Bazin and Freeman claim that the "biological difference between male and female, ... is a major factor in the origin of sex roles" (1974, 201). Such factors like "[m]enstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, infant care"

“reduced woman’s capacity for work, for participation in the shaping of the world, and made her dependent on man for protection and survival” (Bazin and Freeman 1974, 201). As a result, man “turned her biology against her, making it the source of her weakness and using it to label her inferior and thereby to circumscribe and restrict her social, political, and occupational endeavours” (Bazin and Freeman 1974, 201). Bazin and Freeman argue that “[i]t was primarily in the middle class that the problems of the dependent woman were most acutely felt during the nineteenth century” (1974, 206). It was the time of “accumulating wealth and sustaining ... power in the world” and consequently, “women became a form of property” (Bazin and Freeman 1974, 208). Thus, Bazin and Freeman create a connection between the “destruction of patriarchy and the creation of androgyny” (1974, 212). They claim that “the Masculine and the Feminine must unite for the Rebirth of the new human being and the new society. This, in its widest possible sense, is the Androgynous Vision” (1974, 212).

To conclude, *Orlando* can be read as Woolf’s challenge to the common assumptions of the stability of human beings. Through her notion of androgyny, Woolf makes her characters embrace both sexes and genders to evade gender categorizations. *Orlando* can also be regarded as a work in which Woolf transcends the abstractness of her notion of androgyny and practices her ideas in a more concrete sphere. Orlando, Sasha and the Archduchess/Archduke are the three characters whose bodies signify this transcendence towards the ambivalent grotesque body images. *Orlando* throws gender division into doubt and emphasizes the fluidity of human subjectivity that allows the balanced juxtaposition of sexes in one body. Hence, what can be deduced from the novel is the idea that Woolf tries to depict the absurdity of saddling women with feminine responsibilities when the division of human beings into opposing genders is highly problematic. Such flexible bodies and ambivalent sexes in *Orlando* allow the reading of the novel against the background of Bakhtinian carnivalesque grotesque imagery, which is marked by the sense of becoming, incompleteness, ambivalence and perpetual transformation.

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