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Analysing Queerness in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*

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Abstract

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Abstract: The aim of this essay is to analyse Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando* from a queer perspective, focusing both on transgenderism as well as bisexuality and pansexuality. The questions the essay tries to answer is if *Orlando* is queer, and to what extent this is portrayed in a respectful manner. In order to do this, the novel relies on Julia Serano's theory of gender as consisting of intrinsic inclinations, and labels everything which violates the heterosexual matrix as queer. To analyse to which degree the portrayals are respectful, lists of stereotypes are applied. The main results are that *Orlando* is a very queer novel, both regarding gender and sexuality, and while the novel performs queerness in a respectful way, this respect is always conditional and the novel does conform to some stereotypes. The argument of the essay is that the character Orlando belongs to a non-binary gender category, and displays a bisexual or pansexual attraction pattern, and other characters subvert gender and sexual norms in similar ways.

Keywords: Orlando, Woolf, Bisexual, Pansexual, Transgender, Queer, Non-Binary, Modernism

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Introduction

When it comes to modernist fiction, Virginia Woolf can be argued to be one of the most outstanding writers. Not only was she a productive and experimental writer, but also a distinguished member of the Bloomsbury Group, which was an avant-gardist group of British modernist writers. Even though Woolf herself might not have used that word, many label her as an early feminist based partly on how her essay *A Room of One's Own* deals with the emancipation of women. Through the Bloomsbury Group, Woolf also met Vita Sackville-West with whom she had an affair during much of the 1920's. Based on Virginia Woolf's political views and her sexuality it may not be surprising that quite some research has been written on her work focusing on issues of gender and sexuality. However, not as much scholarship as expected exists about the novel *Orlando: A Biography* from 1928, which is a novel that challenges norms about gender and sexuality.

Not only is *Orlando* dedicated to Vita Sackville-West (Woolf XXV), Merry M. Pawlowski notes in the introduction that Sackville-West served as inspiration for the protagonist (VI), highlighting Woolf's own queerness, it also has quite explicit queer themes. The novel's protagonist is a young British nobleman named Orlando born under the reign of Elizabeth I. While serving under the queen, he falls in love with the child of a Russian aristocrat whom he fails to gender as either male or female (Woolf 17). Orlando realizes that this person is in fact a woman, and they have a romantic relationship. Later on, Orlando magically transitions from male to female. After this she lives as a woman for more than 200 years, encountering different obstacles related to being gendered as a woman. One of these is that she is not allowed to own property, and must therefore find a husband. One of the characters who presents himself is Archduke Harry who dresses as a woman in order to engage in a romantic relationship with Orlando during the period she is living as a man. Eventually, Orlando becomes romantically involved with another man. Summarily, *Orlando* presents more than one character that challenges the gender binary, and at least two of these characters are also attracted to more than one gender, mirroring transgender and bi/pansexuality in our modern society respectively.

My essay on Woolf's novel builds on previous research, and furthermore has the explicit aim to perform research that attempts to be as respectful as possible to both transgender individuals, as well as individuals who are bisexual or pansexual. The central argument of this essay is that although *Orlando* is a very queer novel, it is in many ways problematic. The

problematic aspects are constituted by the novel adhering to some disrespectful tropes and stereotypes, which will be further explained through the course of this essay. Although *Orlando* conforms to some stereotypes, it also avoids some of these, and many parts of the novel configure gender and sexuality authentically. It is also important to note that *Orlando* is an important queer novel, since it helps with grounding queerness in history, both in the early 20th century when it was published, as well as the circa four centuries before that during which the narrative takes place.

This essay's topic with the synthesising of queerness related to both gender and sexuality without trying to explain one as a result of the other fills a niche not often occupied in previous research since queer studies tend to focus more on sexuality than gender, and especially homosexuality at the expense of bisexuality. Similarly, gender studies tend to disregard queerness, and focus more on a binary opposition between male and female or masculine and feminine. Therefore, this essay will make an attempt not to repeat these mistakes. Although it might be too bold to label the character Orlando as either bisexual or transgender, Orlando does without a doubt challenge both cisnormative norms about gender as well as heterosexual and monosexual norms about sexuality together with a few other characters. Cisnormative is the term which refers to the societal conception that everyone has a gender identity that matches the gender they were assigned at birth based on their genitals; in short, it is the assumption that no one is transgender. Monosexual is a term that is used as an opposition to multisexual orientations such as bisexuality and pansexuality in order to facilitate the discussion of the particular oppressions faced by multisexual individuals. In order to avoid mistakes often made in previous research, this essay will rely on a partly social constructive view of gender, that is to say, the view that there is no "biological sex" determining gender identity. Instead, this essay will lean on Julia Serano's ideas of subconscious sex dictated by intrinsic inclinations and gendering as an act. Furthermore, this essay will agree that society actively genders individuals based on the heterosexual matrix, a term coined by Judith Butler. For the purposes of this essay, queerness will be defined as anything that violates the heterosexual matrix. Furthermore, Julia Serano's list of tropes in transgender media representation will be used, as well as Shiri Eisner's summary of stereotypical ideas regarding bisexuals.

The questions that this essay will try to answer are as follows:

- What kind of queerness is performed when *Orlando* breaks the heterosexual matrix?

- Do these performances reproduce any tropes, stereotypes or normative descriptions of said queerness?

To understand *Orlando*, this essay will make use of previous research both regarding gender, viewed retrospectively from today back until the modernist era, as well as research regarding the authorship of Virginia Woolf in general and *Orlando* in particular. In her article “Fin de Siècle, Fin de Sexe”, Rita Felski discusses two postmodernist but diverging views on the death of history and of the transsexual subject. The first view is characterized by Jean Baudrillard who views the contemporary abundance of information as the pathology of Western society, and this has resulted in the death of linear time, history and sexual difference. According to Baudrillard the transsexual subject, characterized by sexual signs not corresponding to the traditional signified, is a nightmare destroying everything that was once certain. The other view is characterized by Donna Haraway who agrees that modern society is dominated by an abundance of information and that linear time, history and gender as we knew it are dead. On the other hand, Haraway argues that this destruction of previously distinct categories has a liberating potential since it deconstructs oppressive hierarchies, such as the gender dichotomy. *Orlando* can be said to contain a fictionalised narrative incorporating both the death of gender binaries, and the death of history, connecting to a large degree to what Baudrillard and Haraway discuss. Near the end of her article, Felski discusses the use of transsexuality as a trope and a metaphor, concluding with the following statement:

[Transsexuality’s] elevation to the status of universal signifier (“we are all transsexuals”) subverts established distinctions between male and female, normal and deviant, real and fake, but at the risk of homogenizing differences that matter politically: the differences between women and men, *the difference between those who occasionally play with the trope of transsexuality and those others for whom it is a matter of life or death.* (emphasis added, 347)

The aim of this essay is to be as respectful as possible to those “for whom it is a matter of life and death,” in contrast to previous research which has tended to treat transsexuality as a trope, or theoretical and rhetorical device.

Previous research regarding *Orlando* seems to focus on some recurring themes, but before these are listed and explained the articles and theses used in this essay will be presented. The first of these is Karen Kaivola’s article in which she describes the two differing ways androgyny is explained in *Orlando* and *A Room of One’s Own*, and connecting these to other hybrid identities regarding race, ethnicity and sexual hybridity. Kaivola’s article is deeply

intersectional. Pei-Wen Clio Kao also compares *Orlando* with another book, but not one written by Virginia Woolf. Instead, *Orlando* is compared to Chu Tien-Wen's *Notes of a Desolate Man*, and Kao finds that they differ due to their West/East and modernity/postmodernity divide, but *Orlando* is more postmodern while *Notes* seems to long for a simpler past connected to the era of modernity. Similarly, Marte Rognstad compares *Orlando* to a more recent novel, Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex*, in her thesis. Rognstad's argument is that both of the protagonists in these novels, a transgender character and an intersex character respectively, can be used to show how gender is socially constructed and contingent. This is similar to the argument in Pamela L. Caughie's article, where she compares the fictional *Orlando* to the autobiographical *Man into Woman*. The latter book is written by Lili Elbe, one of the first persons to go through a medical transition, but Caughie disregards this and argues that *Orlando* is a better prototype of how to write about "the transsexual's life" (519), implying that there is only one way to be transgender. Finally, Stef Craps makes a point similar to Rognstad, that characters in *Orlando* who violate the heterosexual matrix can be used to challenge reified notions of gender. While her article is titled "How to Do Things with Gender", only those who in some way deviate from the norm are under scrutiny, seemingly reassuring the norm abiding genders that they are natural and normal.

Based on what has been written in previous research, it seems like some scholars regard Virginia Woolf partly as a kind of prophet anticipating for example Butler's ideas about gender. Pei-Wen Clio Kao states in an article that *Orlando* is "indicative of the performativity of gender and sexual identity as explained by Butler" (5). Kao compares *Orlando* to *Notes of a Desolate Man* which is written during the postmodernist era, but argues that *Orlando* is in many ways more postmodern than the latter book. In her thesis, Marte Rognstad seems to agree with Kao regarding *Orlando*'s borderline prophetic qualities, stating that it "take[s] on a 'Butlerian' understanding of the concept of gender" (i). Kao furthermore states that "[i]t is Woolf's humoristic touch that has prophesized Butler's thought in *Gender Trouble*" (6), which is something that other scholars agree with. Stef Craps writes that this humoristic touch has contributed to a lack of critical readings of *Orlando*, but that this in fact is a very subversive text with regards to gender. Also Karen Kaivola agrees with the notion that it is *Orlando*'s humour which makes it powerful, labelling it as "a playfully subversive response" (240) to oppressive notions about gender.

Regarding gender in *Orlando*, the issue of androgyny is often discussed, comparing and contrasting it with *A Room of One's Own*. In the latter text, according to Craps, Woolf shows an "idealized synthesis of heteropatriarchal gender constructs that leaves existing power rela-

tions basically unchanged” (Showalter in Craps, 183), while *Orlando* presents an androgyny which fluctuates between masculine and feminine. Kaivola partly agrees with Craps and Showalter, stating that there are two different types of androgyny presented in the two texts, but views it as reductive to label the type of androgyny in *A Room of One’s Own* as simply reactionary. Rognstad also discusses the two types of androgyny, but seems to treat *A Room of One’s Own* and *Orlando* as portraying the same kind of androgyny, but valuing the two different kinds unequally, preferring “a truly androgynous character without one gender dominating over the other” (30).

Previous researchers have also focussed on pronouns, as Stef Craps does when labelling the use of “he” in “He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it” (Woolf 5). This phrase, according to Craps, creates doubt regarding Orlando’s sex, partly through the focus on the initial pronoun. Rognstad discusses the pronoun slippage after the transition scene, and argues that the use of “their” indicates a multiplicity of identities in *Orlando*.

Moving away from gender to sexuality, both Craps and Kao argue that Orlando’s subversion of gender boundaries makes non-heterosexual desire possible, and Rognstad argues that Orlando’s sexuality shapes the same character’s gender identity. Pamela L. Caughie argues that Orlando’s continuing attraction to women after the transition is due to habit, and the only reason Orlando desires men later is due to societal pressure. Furthermore, both Kao and Rognstad seem to argue that any sexuality that is not heterosexual or homosexual is “ambiguous”.

When previous researchers have discussed the scene where Orlando transitions from being gendered as male to being gendered as female in chapter 3, they have usually focused on the personifications of purity, chastity and modesty. Craps argues that these are traditionally feminine virtues which try to veil Orlando, while the masculine virtue of truth tries to penetrate this veil. Rognstad argues similarly that these personifications are representative of conservative values. While Craps’ conclusion is that the discourse portrayed is that of women as a mystery to be penetrated by the male imagination, Rognstad’s ditto is that the discourse portrayed is that of gender as stable categories and that one must belong to only one of these categories during one’s life, and that Woolf critiques this discourse. Caughie’s argument is that the digression regarding purity, chastity and modesty is a way for Woolf to mock the notion of physical transition as an instantaneous event.

Due to basing their readings of *Orlando* on Butler’s ideas about performative gender, many previous researchers have made arguments that seem to conflate gender identity with

gender expression. For example, Craps says that Orlando “*becomes* a woman” (182) after wearing dresses for an extended period of time, and Kao argues that due to Shelmerdine having traditionally feminine personality attributes and Orlando having traditionally masculine ones, their genders and sexualities are multiple. Caughie agrees with this, saying that Shelmerdine’s “gender is as suspect as Orlando’s” (514). Rognstad makes similar arguments, for example that Orlando’s “female gender identity develops over time” which is evidenced by her “looking for a husband [...] and she eventually has a baby” (34), which implies that female gender identity consists of simply marrying a man and producing offspring. This essay will not regard gender identity as constructed only by gender expression, in an effort to try to be more respectful towards transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, and this will be explained in greater detail in the theory segment.

During the nineteenth century, gender and racialisation was often conflated with each other, according to Karen Kaivola. For example, sexual dimorphism was considered representative of higher evolutionary stages, and this idea was used to elevate the status of European men and women while simultaneously devaluing everyone else. Kaivola has found that Woolf uses images of “the East” as a metaphor of subversion of gender and sexuality, for example in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando*. Rognstad agrees with Woolf using Constantinople as a way to signal mysteriousness, femininity and subversion of gender binaries, but does not seem to be as critical of it as Kaivola is. In order to sum up this discussion, Kaivola writes: “while Woolf’s Asian imagery provides a means for her to reconfigure stereotypes of female sexual inversion, it is less certain that they similarly reconfigure racial stereotypes” (251).

Many scholars who have previously written about *Orlando* seem to “occasionally play with the trope of transsexuality while disregarding “those others for whom it is a matter of life or death” (Felski 1996 347). Perhaps the most explicit example is Caughie’s article, which makes the argument that *Orlando* is a better prototype of transgender life writing than Lili Elbe’s auto-biography, disregarding that *Orlando* is a fictional work and *Man into Woman* is an actual piece of life writing dealing with a real life transgender individual. Furthermore, Caughie seems to imply that there is only one right way to write about “the transsexual’s life” (519), which also implies that there is only one way to live as a transgender individual. Lastly, Caughie argues that “[i]nstead of taking the transsexual as the subject of Woolf’s novel [...] I take this figure as its object of thought” (502) and that “the figure of the transsexual allows for a truer depiction of the genre called life writing” (519), explicitly stating that she is concerned with transgender issues mainly as a theoretical trope for the benefit of the mainstream produc-

tion of life writing. Craps can also be argued to use transsexuality as a trope, while discussing how the bodies who fall outside the heterosexual matrix can be used to critique this very matrix, and Kaivola seems to agree with this and uses both androgynous and intersex people in an argument trying to dismantle the patriarchy. Rognstad's argument is similarly that transgender and intersex characters can be used to show how gender is culturally constructed.

This essay will consist of two chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter one will follow directly after this introductory part and present a historical background as well as the theories used in the analysis. The main purpose of this first chapter is to provide a lens through which to view the results, which will be included in chapter two together with the discussion. The results will consist mainly of quotes found in the novel which will be discussed in order to answer the research questions. Lastly, there will be the conclusion where the findings are summarized and future research suggested.

Chapter 1: Historical Background and Theory

This chapter will act as a background for the analysis performed in the second chapter, and therefore present what Rita Felski has written about gender during modernity and postmodernism, as well as the theories which this essay relies on. The discussion about Felski's work is included because the understanding of gender during modernity must in some way have influenced Virginia Woolf while writing *Orlando*, since Woolf lived and wrote during the period discussed by Felski. The postmodernist viewpoints of gender are used to try to provide a basis for a contemporary understanding of *Orlando*, that is, contemporary to this essay and in essence reflecting on "how does *Orlando* work today?".

In order to discuss the view on gender during modernity, one must first delineate what modernity is. In her book *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski tries to do that, saying that modernity was not a unified period with one single way of understanding the world; it was not a "homogenous *Zeitgeist*" but instead a "collection of interlocking institutional, cultural, and philosophical strands" (Felski 12). Modernity can also be understood as a gradual rejection of Victorian values, which also influences modernist writing. This rejection of Victorian values was partly exemplified by the phrase "fin de siècle, fin de sexe", coined by Jean Lorrain. In short, it refers to the gender confusion which permeated the time around the end of the nineteenth century. At the end of the century, gender differences were also coming to an end according to popular mythology, due to the onslaught of modern change (Felski "Fin de siècle" 338).

Another aspect of modernity was the rapid growth of consumer capitalism, and according to Felski, consumer and woman were to a large extent equated during the late nineteenth century. This equation freed women from the private sphere they had been limited to previously (61), Felski continues to state that this postulated similarity between femininity and modernity was closely connected to the demonization of the latter. Instead of modernity being characterized by masculine logic, it was seen as a nightmare of glittering advertisements urging women without control over their impulses to acquire ever more possessions (62).

During this period, the male avant-garde writers felt excluded from the hegemonic middle-class masculinity of the time, and because of this they started appropriating femininity as a way of subverting both sexual and textual norms, which led to them using femininity as a governing metaphor for fin-de-siècle writing (Felski 91). Fin de sexe was apparent. Felski argues that although the identification by men with femininity might have contributed to this

anxiety, it did not contribute to the emancipation of women. Instead femininity became disconnected from women (91) and instead came to symbolize artifice (94). Since the men who identified with femininity belonged to the avant-garde, they were a societal elite with regard to their aesthetic taste, and this led to them defining themselves against women who they saw as vulgar consumers who were slaves to the consumerist attitudes of modernity (105-107). Once again, women were demonised. The domain of feminized aesthetic production allowed for expression of male homosexual desire which could not be expressed elsewhere, linking modernist writing in some ways to male homosexuals (103). The femininity and rejection of heterosexuality through literary production could be linked to *Orlando*, in which the protagonist can be argued to always blur distinctions between gender expressions and has a bisexual pattern of desire, while at the same time always being occupied with writing and literature.

The growing European feminism movements worked simultaneously to acquire access to the public spheres for women, and the figure of the New Woman emerged. This figure was a challenge to what was, and strived for emancipation and an alternative future, and sought to destabilise previous paradigms regarding gender (14). Taken together, male avant-garde embracing of femininity and the New Woman challenging of gender norms fed into the growing anxiety regarding rapidly changing assumption about gender (92).

In her article, Felski argues that if femininity was the governing metaphor of the last turn of the century, the fin de millenium is governed by the metaphor of transgenderism (337). As summarized in the introduction, Felski discusses two differing views on this subject; the dystopian vision argued by Baudrillard and the emancipatory and subversive view of Haraway. This leads to a discussion about the death of history from a postmodern perspective. Felski argues that by looking at the past from a present perspective and trying to find previously silenced voices is not an effort to destroy the metanarratives of history; instead it can be viewed as an effort to discover what has been excluded from unified metanarratives and by doing this one can “rewrite and extend, rather than negate, history” (345). Based on this argument, this essay will look at *Orlando* from a perspective firmly anchored in the present day’s understanding of queerness, trying to extend the history of queerness and show that the traces have always been there, even if they were understood differently at that time. Before moving on to a discussion of the theories used in this essay, I would like to once again bring attention to the distinction Felski makes at the end of her article, the distinction “between those who occasionally play with the trope of transsexuality and those others for whom it is a matter of life or death” (347). As seen in the introduction, many of the scholars who have previously written about *Orlando* seem to use the trope of transsexuality without any regard to

those for whom it is a matter of life and death. The intention of the present essay is to counter that tendency, and instead use theories that are more respectful to transgender individuals.

Just like many of the scholars who have previously written about *Orlando*, I will also partly base my understanding of gender on Judith Butler's theories. In particular, this essay will use the term "heterosexual matrix" which Butler coined in order to:

designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and, desires are naturalized [...] [which] assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (Butler 208)

For the purposes of this essay, this will be regarded as the way the heteropatriarchy functions in order to construct everyone as heterosexual and cisgender, as well as maintaining patriarchal domination over everyone who is anything else than a man. These deviating identities are what Craps calls "unviable (un)subjects – 'abjects'" (176). As stated in the introduction, queerness will be defined as the violation of the heterosexual matrix, which makes abjects and queer identities coincide. In her thesis, Marte Rognstad refers to Butler stating that sex is as culturally constructed as gender, which I agree with. Butler elaborates on this in *Gender Trouble* with the following quote:

Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts. (10)

This means that there is no biological essence of gender, but as with all categorization sex is a contingent cultural construction. Sex is not objectively understood, but rather understood through the lens of cultural assumptions about gender, which makes sex always already gendered. Rognstad follows up this thought with the statement that "[o]f course there is a physical difference between men and women" (12), a statement which the theoretical framework of this essay renounces. There are biological differences between different bodies, but if sex does not dictate gender, this physical difference is not between "men and women".

What differentiates this essay from the previously performed research on similar topics is the fact that this essay will not base itself entirely on Butler's assumption that gender is wholly performative, and instead use some theories found in Julia Serano's book *Whipping*

Girl. This book is written partly as a transgender manifesto, and partly as a way for Serano to challenge paradigms within feminism, and they are challenged in order to make feminist discourse more welcoming to transgender individuals. Due to this, Serano's theories are very well adapted for using when writing an essay trying to be respectful towards transgender individuals. The problem with Butler's performativity theory is that it leads to a conflation of gender expression with gender identity. This is problematic, since it leads to less nuanced analyses of gender by conflating two different aspects into one, and also because it often leads to misgenderings. In order to understand the term misgendering, one must first discuss what Serano refers to as *gendering*, a term which refers to how everyone divides every other individual they meet into one of two categories, man or woman. What Serano points out is that this is not a natural or passive task, but rather a compulsion dictated by the heterosexual matrix, and she says that "we tend to make the call one way or another no matter how far away a person is or how little evidence we have to go by" (112). What is important to note about gendering is that gendering assigns a *perceived gender* to the individual who has been gendered, which in many cases is contrary to the individual's gender identity, especially when it comes to transgender individuals. The act of gendering someone incorrectly is what is called *misgendering* and is a form of transphobic violence. Serano concludes:

Most cissexuals remain oblivious to the subjective nature of gendering, primarily because they themselves have not regularly had the experience of being *misgendered* - i.e., mistakenly assigned a gender that does not match one's identified gender. Unfortunately, this lack of experience usually leads cissexuals to mistakenly believe that the process of gendering is a matter of pure observation, rather than the act of speculation it is. (emphasis in original, 113)

Since this essay refutes Butler's performativity, an alternative is required. If gender is not performative, what is gender? Serano argues that "both social constructionists and gender essentialists are wrong (or at least they are both only partially right)" (68). She follows this up with arguing that people with exceptional gender expressions (feminine men, masculine women) are too common to just be genetic anomalies, providing a strong counter argument against gender essentialists. Furthermore, these exceptional expressions are usually present before children are fully socialized and continue to be present into adulthood, countering the claim that gender expression is purely a social construction.

Instead of adhering to either biological essentialism or social constructionism, Serano presents the theory of *subconscious sex*, which this essay will rely on. *Subconscious sex* is

almost exactly what it sounds like, “the gender we subconsciously feel ourselves to be” (56), while gender identity is what we *consciously* identify as. This could by some be viewed as a move towards the essentialism refuted by Butler, but it can be argued that it retains the radical questioning of gender paradigms by refusing to resort to biological determinism or genitals as the determination of gender, while at the same time being respectful to the transgender community and its members by not misgendering them. The model proposed by Serano consists of three *intrinsic inclinations*: subconscious sex, gender expression and sexual orientation. These three inclinations are largely independent from each other. It is also important to note that these inclinations do not each result in one of two opposite outcomes, but should instead be viewed as three continua with multiple possible outcomes, opening up for more than just man and woman, homosexual and heterosexual, feminine or masculine (69-71). These theories will be used in the analysis of *Orlando* as a way to avoid, for example, conflating gender identity with gender expression, as well as misgendering characters who could be read as transgender. Lastly, the theory of intrinsic inclinations allows for non-binary genders, as opposed to a biologist or performative view of gender, which is important for the analysis of Orlando, who seems to belong to a gender category different from man or woman.

In the analysis of *Orlando*, I will rely on stereotypes and tropes, and stereotypes regarding transgender individuals will be discussed first. According to Serano, media representations of transgender individuals often consist of one of two archetypes: the “deceptive transsexual” or the “pathetic transsexual” (29). The former of these archetypes is portrayed as beautiful women who are later outed as trans, and their motives are those of sexual predators trying to “fool innocent straight guys into falling for other ‘men’” (ibid.). The defining trait of “deceptive transsexuals” is the compulsory outing, where their female gender identity is falsely portrayed as an illusion, and their assigned gender at birth, that is male, is assumed to be their real identity. Of course, this is both misgendering and contributes to a demonizing of trans women. The other archetype, the “pathetic transsexual” is portrayed as overly masculine, and their constant insistence on being women, which contrasts with their stereotypically masculine appearance, is played for laughs (30). Serano emphasises that this contrast between gender identity and outward appearance is not intended to subvert assumptions about gender, but rather reinforce the false and oppressive idea that trans women are men. This is also true regarding “deceptive transsexuals”, because while “pathetic transsexuals” are viewed as “men” because of their masculine appearance, “deceptive transsexuals” are portrayed as “wol[ves] in sheep’s clothing” (32). Despite their differences, these two archetypes share the same goal: to portray trans women as men.

In order to analyse whether *Orlando* is respectful or not regarding sexuality, and because Orlando and other characters seem to be bisexual or pansexual, Shiri Eisner's *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution* is relevant. In this book, Eisner presents six different bisexual stereotypes: bisexuality does not exist; bisexuals are confused, indecisive, or going through a phase; bisexuals are slutty, promiscuous, and inherently unfaithful; bisexuals are carriers or vectors of HIV and other STIs; bisexuals are actually gay or straight; and lastly bisexuals can choose to be gay or straight. As a complement to these general stereotypes regarding bisexuality, Eisner states that there is a specific stereotype regarding the intersection between bisexuality and transgenderism; "Trans people have also been imagined as inherently bisexual because of the transphobic presumption that they are necessarily 'both man and woman in one'" (127). This stereotype often misgenders trans people, and disqualifies them from deciding their own sexuality. Eisner presents two different ways to answer these stereotypes, of which the first is summarised as "that's not true" (23). The other way to answer these stereotypes is to acknowledge that this is true to some extent, some bisexuals are confused, promiscuous or HIV positive, and saying that bisexuals are never those things participates in erasing many bisexual individuals. Furthermore, Eisner argues that portraying bisexuals in a negative light shows a societal fear regarding bisexuals, since being bisexual breaks many norms. This makes a bisexual identity subversive, and can be used in order to challenge the hegemony, instead of trying to adapt to societal standard through what Eisner calls respectability politics. The "that's not true" answer to stereotypes is labelled as an example of not wanting to subvert the status quo. In other words, these stereotypes can be seen as a double edged sword, according to Eisner. On the one hand, they contribute to reproducing biphobia in mainstream society, but on the other hand they open up the possibility of a radical positioning against this same mainstream society. This essay will try to take both of these points into consideration during the analysis, critiquing the reproduction of biphobia while at the same time welcoming a subversion of hegemonies.

It is important to note that Serano is mostly occupied with discussing trans women, and Eisner with discussing bisexuals, while this essay is directed at analysing *Orlando* with a sensitivity regarding both the whole scope of transgender individuals, not just women, and multi-sexual identities, not just bisexuals. Therefore, this essay will try to apply Serano's ideas to all characters in *Orlando* who can be argued to be transgender in some way, as far as it is possible. Similarly, this essay will, as far as it is possible, try to apply Eisner's list of stereotypes to all characters who are multisexual in some way. The next chapter will consist of results found in the novel *Orlando*, and these will be discussed in relation to what has been outlined in this

chapter, to the previous research when it can provide interesting insight, and of course in relation to the research questions in order to try to produce answers to these.

Chapter 2: Playing Queer Tricks and Analysing the Novel

Several scholars have argued that Virginia Woolf can be read as a prophet of gender theory, anticipating Judith Butler's ideas about performative gender. While such a reading of *Orlando* surely is viable, this essay will focus on a slightly different aspect. Instead of arguing that *Orlando* confirms performativity, the argument will be put forward that it confirms Serano's theory about intrinsic inclinations, which is the idea that gender does not follow from sex, but is instead made up of three different inclinations which are intrinsic to a person. These inclinations are: gender identity, gender expression and sexuality. They do not necessarily correlate, and are to be understood as continua rather than binary divisions between man/woman, masculine/feminine or heterosexual/homosexual respectively.

Orlando is a very queer novel, and it seems that the novel alludes to ideas similar to the theory of intrinsic inclinations. For example, the narrator discusses how looks can be deceiving in this passage, "Nature, who has played so many queer tricks upon us, [...] often of the most incongruous, for the poet has a butcher's face and the butcher a poet's" (37). This could be read as the butcher being a symbol for masculinity and men, while the poet being a symbol for femininity and women. If a "poet has a butcher's face" it could be read as *Orlando* implying the idea that people who are gendered as men are sometimes women, and although this is a "queer trick" it is all the same natural. Of course, this requires quite some interpretation in order to make sense. After Orlando's body has been magically transformed in chapter three, it is stated that "[t]he change of sex [...] did nothing whatever to alter their identity" (67), implying that Orlando's gender identity correlates to neither sex nor gender expression. Furthermore, this change is described as being "accomplished painlessly and completely in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at all" (68) and Orlando's actions are labelled as deliberate, the biographer noting that this might make it possible to argue that the change was premeditated. The fact that the change was painless and might have been deliberate, makes it possible to argue that Orlando, rather than being a passive victim, was always intrinsically inclined to not be a cis man.

If one assumes that Orlando did in fact actively choose to go through transition, that would make the following quote easier to explain; "It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and of a woman's sex. *And perhaps in this she was only expressing rather more openly than usual*" (emphasis added 92). Still, these sentences do state that there was some change in Orlando herself which lead to this, that change could have

been an acceptance of her own identity. The second sentence in this quote can be used to strengthen the argument that Orlando had an inclination towards not living as a cis man, and through, or because of, the magical transition, she expressed this inclination “rather more openly than usual”. This argument also entails that Orlando is precisely as she has always been, except expressing it more openly, and this is further solidified by the fact that once she returns home from Turkey, where the transition took place, “[n]o one showed an instant’s suspicion that Orlando was not the Orlando they had known” (83), which shows that also other people see that Orlando is herself. Nonetheless, it is impossible to argue that Orlando does not change at all during the narrative, but as she reflects towards the end of the novel “through all these changes she had remained [...] fundamentally the same. She had the same brooding meditative temper, the same love of animals and nature, the same passion for the country and the seasons” (117). She has changed, but it is possible to read this as Orlando growing up, but still remaining the same person in many important aspects.

Lastly, on the topic of intrinsic inclinations, the narrator of the novel makes suggestive remarks which can be read as more generally applicable, and not only on the character Orlando. The first of these is as follows: “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” (92-93). First of all, it is explicitly stated that this applies to “every human being”. Secondly, this “vacillation” can be interpreted as similar to the fact that intrinsic inclinations are continua, rather than discrete binaries. Lastly, it shows that there is a radical discontinuation between “the clothes that keep the male or female likeness”, which is gender expression, and the sex underneath which could be interpreted as gender identity. Furthermore, Orlando speculates regarding gender expressions, and realises that “women are not (judging by [her] own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely apparelled by nature” (77), which once again shows how gender expression does not necessarily correlate with gender identity. The fact that Orlando transitions is, of course, something that violates the heterosexual matrix. In other words, this is a queer element in the novel. By reading the above mentioned passages as arguments for intrinsic inclinations, one could argue that these parts are a respectful portrait of said queerness. Both Kao and Rognstad argue that *Orlando* can be read as Woolf anticipating Butler’s theories of performative gender, although, based on the last paragraphs, it is clearly shown that the same argument can be made regarding *Orlando* and the theory of intrinsic inclinations. Woolf’s novel is filled with meaning,

especially regarding gender, and there are always passages which can be interpreted in accordance with theories developed long after the publication of *Orlando*.

The previous paragraph touched upon the notion of gender expression, and Orlando's expression is something that previous researchers have focused on, and especially the notion of androgyny. In the opening scene of the novel, the reader is introduced to Orlando, and the narrator says that there can be "no doubt of his sex", which is male at the time (5), although the clothes he is wearing are implied to be quite feminine. This contrast, coupled with the fact that he is fantasising to follow in his forefathers' footsteps and enact colonialist violence on other parts of the world, shows how Orlando fulfils the synthesised form of androgyny, discussed mainly by Craps, but also Kaivola and Rognstad. Orlando is also described as being emotional in a way that is often gendered as a feminine trait, but still fantasising about masculine adventures (8), reinforcing the idea that he incorporates both masculine and feminine traits. After Orlando is betrayed by the Russian princess Sasha, he falls into a trance which mirrors the trance that he will fall into before his transition into living as a woman. The result of this is described as Orlando becoming more rational, which is a masculine trait, but shortly after he is described as being femininely emotional again (34). Similarly, he is described as "[n]ever [thinking] twice about heading a charge or fighting a duel" while at the same time being "subject to the lethargy of thought" (49) and after the transition scene she is described as having a form which "combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace" (67). Orlando also seems to enjoy pretty skirts associated with a feminine gender role because of their beauty, but dislikes the hindrance they entail. In short, Orlando is often described as fusing feminine and masculine traits into one coherent identity, which breaks the expectations of the heterosexual matrix. While Showalter and Craps seems to argue that such a fusion of feminine and masculine serves patriarchal interests, Rognstad argues, that a "truly androgynous character without one gender dominating over the other" (30) is more subversive than anything else. Kaivola seems to argue that the truth is more nuanced than that, which this essay agrees with. Such scrutiny of transgender individuals' gender expressions, while disregarding the gender expressions of cisgender individuals, only serves to reinforce the otherness and oppression of trans individuals, rather than help to subvert patriarchy.

At other times, Orlando is described as being just feminine, like when he is introduced in the beginning of the novel and the focus is on his "shapely legs" (5), "youthful beauty" and "eyes like drowned violets" (6), which can all be interpreted as feminine descriptions. In fact, Orlando's legs are consistently objectified throughout the novel (5, 10, 25, 56, 57, 61, 63, 74, 77, 78, 86, 92, 106). Although this objectification happens repeatedly, it seems like the only

time the previous research has discussed this in great length is when Orlando is gendered as a woman, and by accidentally showing her wrist almost makes a sailor fall from a mast (77). This one-sided focus could be interpreted as the scholars focusing on passages which confirm their own understanding of how gender roles work. Orlando is also very shy (9), and deeply emotional (21). After having fled to Constantinople, he often appears as “properly scented, curled and anointed” (59). Many of the feminine descriptions happen before the transition scene, such as those mentioned up to this point in the present paragraph, which seems to be a violation of the heterosexual matrix and therefore queer. Also after the transition, Orlando is described as feminine, as, for example, when she buys a full outfit of feminine clothing before boarding the ship to England, and is treated as a lady because of it. This is a new experience for Orlando and leads her to reflect on gender expression (75), showing how it is not necessarily dictated by gender identity, affirming the theory of intrinsic inclinations and contributing to queer themes within the novel.

In a similar vein, Orlando is sometimes described as being masculine. One such example is when Sasha is described as waking his manhood (18), implying that he was not masculine before that. After Orlando’s transition, she is described as having “courage” (68) and she also “washed in streams if she washed at all” (69), both of which are violations of the feminine gender role. Also, she is contrasted with “lovely young wom[e]n” because she has herself had sexual relationships with many women, something which the heterosexual matrix does not allow for females. When living as a woman, Orlando is described as dressing up in her old clothes which results in her looking like “the very figure of a noble lord” (106), which implies her having a masculine gender expression but not being a man. As one can see by the use of pronouns in this paragraph, most of these examples are collected from parts of the novel where Orlando lives as a woman, implying that she breaks the heterosexual matrix. Summarily, Orlando’s androgyny can be labelled both as the “idealized synthesis” critiqued in Craps’ article, as well as the opposite of Rognstad’s “truly androgynous character”. In some passages Orlando seems to fuse femininity with masculinity seamlessly, while other passages show how Orlando vacillates between them.

Orlando is not only described as a masculine, cross-dressing woman, she also resembles the figure of the New Woman, as described by Rita Felski. Orlando smokes (84, 132, 152) and drives a car (147). Although she seems to suffer from road rage (148), she is also described as an expert driver (151) who drives fast out of London (152). Felski also discusses how femininity in fin-de-siècle culture is closely connected to consumption, a thought which is found in *Orlando* when the protagonist re-applies make-up while standing in a department

store (149). The subversion of gender norms is a recurring theme, as when Orlando is unaware of the norms changing and thinks that “one could still say what one liked and wear knee-breeches or skirts as the fancy took one” (114). Summarily, Orlando is often portrayed as a character who is freed from the heterosexual matrix’s limiting grasp, and this is often done in an approving tone, showing a respectful characterisation of queerness.

While Orlando’s queerness regarding gender expression is often presented as positive, portrayals of other characters who do similar things can be read as not being as respectful. To begin with, one can recall Karen Kaivola’s argument that Woolf appropriates Asian imagery as metaphors to portray gender subversion, something which Pawlowski agrees with in the introduction to the novel (XVIII-XIX). Kaivola also states that the portrayals of people from “the East” as less sexually dimorphic was at the time also thought to correlate to them belonging to lower evolutionary stages. This can be argued to tie into racist discourse, constructing “the East” as “the Other”. That is not the only thing which can be labelled as racist, but also the fact that Woolf consistently uses derogatory terms for both Africans and nomadic tribes in Turkey (35, 62, 64, 68 - 75, 78, 80, 86, 116, 123, 127, 153, 161). With that in mind, analysing the description of the Russian princess Sasha and Orlando’s inability to gender her as either man or woman (17), one can see how this discourse contributes to a disrespectful portrayal of gender subversion on racist grounds. Furthermore, Orlando has racist prejudices regarding what life is like in Russia, imagining that “the women in Muscovy wear beards and the men are covered with fur from the waist down; that both sexes are smeared with tallow to keep the cold out, tear meat with their fingers and live in huts where an English noble would scruple to keep his cattle” (22). This quote shows how the narrator obviously takes a stand against the barbaric subversion of gender norms presented in it. This extends somewhat to the descriptions of men and women being attracted to Orlando after moving to Constantinople, and the nomadic tribes with which he lives for a while in which “the [...] women, except for in one or two important particulars, differ very little from the [...] men” (75). These descriptions are less condemning, but still bear traces of being constructed as Other in relationship to Orlando and the West.

Even characters in the West are described as breaking gender norms. For example, Queen Elizabeth I is described as quite masculine in her striving for power (10) and outwards directed aggressions (11), while at the same time constructed as quite old and ugly. Furthermore, Orlando spends time with London’s working class, in which the women are “bold in their speech” and “free in their manners” (13), but also implied to be less civilised than the royal court. Perhaps, the clearest example of a disrespectful portrayal of a queer Western

character is Arch Duchess Harriet, also known as Arch Duke Harry. Except for the descriptions of her being focussed on her extreme height, she is also labelled as quite unattractive, clumsy, constantly “tee-hees” and “haw-haws”, which leads Orlando to think that she has escaped “from the lunatic asylum” (55). This can be connected to Serano’s trope of the “pathetic transsexual”, since Harriet/Harry tries very hard to fit into a feminine gender role in order to be gendered as a woman, but constantly seems to fail. Orlando tries to avoid her (56) and later runs away to Constantinople because he realises he is attracted to her, even though she is described as quite hideous (57).

The attraction between Harry/Harriet and Orlando is symbolised by “Lust the vulture, not Love, the Bird of Paradise” (57), showing how negatively the narrative judges this attraction to be. This can be connected to Serano’s other trope, the “deceptive transsexual”, which consists of a “man dressing as a woman” in order to “trick” another man to sleep with “him”. That trope is later explicitly completed when Harriet/Harry confesses to be a man who dressed as a woman to engage romantically with Orlando (88), complete with a dramatic unveiling. Shortly after this unveiling, Harry/Harriet returns to being described as a very pathetic character to be laughed at, as when Orlando cheats in a game they play, and has to do so several times in order for Harriet/Harry to notice it. It was Orlando’s hope that Harry/Harriet would be “manly enough to refuse to have anything further to do with her” (89), but this does not turn out as Orlando wants, which leads to Harriet/Harry being described as a pathetic character in part because he is a feminine man. In contrast to the above mentioned disrespectful portrayals of queer characters, Orlando’s husband Shelmerdine is described as being androgynous, as in the following quote: “For each was so surprised at the quickness of the other’s sympathy, and it was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman” (127). This shows that neither Orlando nor Shelmerdine follow gender roles, but this is described as positive.

Orlando being one of the few characters whose subversion of gender norms is not immediately identifiable as disrespectful, and the fact that they are the protagonist in the novel, makes it reasonable to examine Orlando more closely. First of all, one might focus on the fact that the previous sentence used “they” to refer to Orlando, although that is just one character. The fact is that the novel uses “they” as a singular pronoun about Orlando: “Orlando slowly drew in his head, sat down at the table, and, with the half-conscious air of one doing what *they* do every day of their lives at that hour” (emphasis added, 6), as well as “[t]he change of sex [...] did nothing whatever to alter *their* identity. *Their* faces remained [...] practically the same” (emphasis added, 67). Craps argues that the second of these quotes show that Orlando

has a multiple identity: “Human subjectivity is not unified and coherent but shifting and fluid. Orlando is composed of a multiplicity of selves none of which can lay claim to being more authentic or essential than the rest” (179). Rognstad agrees with Craps’ argument, and while human subjectivity might not be unified, the argument put forward in the present essay is that this interpretation is rather farfetched, compared to the fact that singular “they” is the most common gender-neutral pronoun in the English language. Based on this, one can argue that “they” is used gender-neutrally in *Orlando*. Furthermore, the biographer states that the pronoun “she” will be used about Orlando “for convention’s sake” (67), which opens up for the possibility to view the use of “he” regarding Orlando as another effect of convention. This would make it possible to argue that Orlando perhaps might not be either woman nor man, but instead belong to a non-binary gender category, which is a continuation of the discussion regarding intrinsic inclinations above.

In previous research, the discussion of Orlando’s gender identity is often accompanied by a discussion of the transition scene, and that will happen also in this essay. Still, first it would be interesting to note that the transition is mirrored by other events occurring before and after it. The first of these is a trance which Orlando falls into after Sasha has broken his heart, and leads to him sleeping for seven days (30), foreshadowing the transition. It is stated that Orlando is more rational after this trance, but he shortly resumes being emotional. The second mirroring of the transition is when Orlando is about to give birth to a child, and the segment leading up to that mentions the three sisters who tried to cover Orlando during the transition, Purity, Chastity and Modesty, and the biographer wishes they would come back and try to hide Orlando once again (144). Furthermore, Constantinople is mentioned, where the transition took place (145), and directly after Orlando’s child is born, there are three asterisks marking an elliptical break between who she was before and who she is after (146). Asterisks like these are only present after the transition scene and the birth scene, heavily implying a connection between the two events. Interestingly, Orlando’s child is not mentioned ever again, showing how both of the mirroring events have results which are negated shortly afterwards.

Craps and Rognstad have argued that the personifications of Purity, Chastity and Modesty are conservative feminine values, which I agree with. The personification of Truth can be read as a symbol for masculinity, as Craps indicates, or as the guiding principle of the biographer. Furthermore, it could be interpreted as the biographer being masculine, because of truth being the guiding principle. Before the transition begins, the biographer states that it would be better to end the narrative there to “spare the reader what is to come” (65), showing

an adverse feeling towards Orlando's transition. Also Purity, Chastity and Modesty dislike the transition; Purity says she wants to "cover vice and poverty", implying that Orlando is vicious; Chastity says she wants to "[r]ather than let Orlando wake, I will freeze him to the bone" and implies she wants to kill him rather than let him transition, while Modesty chooses to simply not witness the transition (66). This can be read as a fictionalisation of transphobia and cisnormativity.

After the sisters have been defeated by Truth, they retreat and say that there are still some who cherish them; "lawyers and doctors; those who prohibit; those who deny; those who reverence without knowing why" (67). Lawyers and doctors are often included in the transition processes of trans people, and these often fill the function of prohibiting and denying trans individuals their rights, and revere old norms and dogmas perhaps without sufficient reason to do so. In short, it seems as if Woolf manages to write a passage which today can be read as quite an accurate representation of the transition process, if one discounts the magic, of course. Caughie discussed that this is a process, and says that the lengthy digression involving the sisters is Woolf's way of mocking the idea of instant physical transition. I would also like to argue that the fact that Truth triumphs in the end shows that the biographer, who has truth as a guiding principle, is not entirely against Orlando transitioning. Pawlowski writes in the introduction that Woolf's father had been the first editor of *Dictionary of National Biography*, which belonged to the "Victorian biographical mod[e]" (X). Instead of focusing simply on factual truth, as past biographers had done, Woolf followed Harold Nicholson's recommendations in *The Development of English Biography*, which was to marry biography and fiction (XII). When discussing Orlando's biographer, who is also the narrator, Craps states that being a biographer and concerned with truth and facts is a traditionally masculine position, although, throughout the novel the narrative shows how hard it is for the biographer to adhere strictly to facts. Based on one passage, where the biographer mocks other men for being preoccupied with facts, Craps argues that the biographer seems to vacillate between both a masculine fondness of truth, as well as a feminine distance from the same fondness (186-187). It is possible to argue that this vacillation in the narrator could partly account for the contradictions in the portrayals of gender and sexuality within the novel.

Another passage which symbolises transphobia in society is when Orlando returns to England and learns that there are several lawsuits against her, among others "(1) that she was dead, and therefore could not hold any property whatsoever; (2) that she was a woman, which amounts to much the same thing" (82), which can be read as equating being a woman with being as bad as being dead. Furthermore, Orlando is described as being "uncertain whether

she was alive or dead, man or woman” (ibid.), showing once again that Orlando might belong to a non-binary gender category, and the grammar of the construction links alive to man, and dead to woman, respectively. On the boat to England, Orlando talks in a way which implies that she “belonged to neither” (77) of the binary gender categories and she is “not sure to which she belong[s]” (78). The fact that Orlando is not allowed to be gendered by others as non-binary, could be read as a form of cisnormativity or transphobia, but whether one is to blame the novel or the society it portrays is hard to determine.

Orlando is not only queer because of gender identity and expression, but also because of sexuality. It is early established that Orlando has several intimate relationships with women while living as a man (12, 14), and shortly after he falls for Sasha who is a woman (17), although Orlando is uncertain about her gender when he falls for her. When Orlando thinks they are both boys he becomes immensely frustrated, thinking that “all embraces were out of the question”, portraying internalised homophobia. After Sasha has hurt him, Orlando focuses on poetry and spends a lot of time with Nicholas Greene, who eventually hurts him as well, leading Orlando to thinking “I have done with men” (46) and that “Greene’s ridicule of his tragedy hurt him as much as the Princess’ ridicule of his love” (49). This can be connected to what Rita Felski writes about how the domain of the aesthetic became inseparably linked with male homosexuality during the period when *Orlando* was written, seemingly implying an attraction between Orlando and Greene. This argument is strengthened when one considers that Orlando thinks of the time spent with Greene as an “affair” (86), a word which has sexual connotations. The pansexual or bisexual attraction pattern evidenced by Orlando is emphasised many times, such as in the quote that she “enjoyed the love of both sexes equally” (108). Furthermore, Orlando marries Rosina Pepita (64) and later Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire (129).

Orlando does not seem to fulfil any of the general stereotypes regarding bisexuality as described by Eisner, but seeing how Orlando can be read as trans, it is possible to argue that the characterisation of Orlando participates in the derogatory discourse that all trans individuals are bisexual. While living as a woman, Orlando dresses in masculine clothing in order to flirt with a woman, and later dramatically unveils that she is in fact not a man (106-107), fitting closely with the trope of the “deceptive transsexual”. These disrespectful elements can, of course, also be argued to be applicable on the character Arch Duchess Harriet, as discussed above. He fits the trope of a “deceptive transsexual”, and the fact that he is attracted to Orlando both when they live as woman and as man, Harry can be argued to be just as bisexual or

pansexual as Orlando. Since Harriet also can be read as belonging to the trans spectrum, the bisexual trope regarding trans individuals is fulfilled in this case as well.

Regarding sexuality, one can also note that the character Orlando seems to be very critical of heteronormative monogamous marriage or coupling, such as when she reflects about “some new discovery [which] had been made about the race; that they were somehow stuck together, couple after couple, but who had made it, and when, she could not guess. It did not seem to be nature” (119). The above quote can easily be read as a satirical response to monogamous coupling, especially when it is heteronormative, seeing how an earlier sentence explicitly states that Orlando witnesses how men and women exhibit this behaviour. Also, Orlando only considers finding a husband as “the most desperate of remedies” (120) in order to fit in with the spirit of the age. Although other scholars have argued that she surrenders “completely and submissively to the spirit of the age” (ibid.), it is possible to notice that she has not in fact surrendered completely. Only by rebelling against the spirit of the age, and turning to nature instead of finding a husband, she manages to find love (122-123). After Orlando and Shelmerdine have married she thinks “if one’s husband was always sailing round Cape Horn, was it marriage? If one liked him, was it marriage? If one liked other people, was it marriage?” and then reaches the conclusion of “Hang it all!” (130) and continues writing Sapphic poetry about “Egyptian girls” (131). This shows how even in a heteronormative monogamous marriage, Shelmerdine and Orlando succeed in subverting sexual and gender norms. Although, this could also be interpreted as adhering to the stereotype about pansexuals and bisexuals being unfaithful, as presented by Eisner. On the other hand, one could also argue that Eisner stated that these stereotypes could be read as subversive, and the fact that Orlando is still attracted to other people could be read as a subversion of monogamous norms and a celebration of polyamorous relationships.

It has already been discussed that Arch Duchess Harriet is portrayed quite disrespectfully, and it is possible to argue that this continues in the portrayal of their sexuality. Arch Duke Harry’s function in the novel, aside from being laughed at, seems to be to relentlessly pursue Orlando romantically and sexually, which could partly be compared to the stereotype of bisexuals being slutty. Although, Arch Duchess Harriet does not seem to have a sexual appetite for anyone else than Orlando, but this appetite is portrayed as insatiable. Furthermore, bisexuals are stereotyped as being carrier of STIs, which is often culturally misrepresented as being unclean, while “lust the Vulture”, the personification of Arch Duke Harry’s attraction to Orlando, can be argued to share similar connotations as uncleanliness. Orlando’s first love, Sasha, is portrayed to be unfaithful, especially when she has an affair with a seaman and

breaks Orlando's heart (24). On the other hand, it is hard to argue that Sasha is either bisexual or pansexual, because the only characters she is confirmed to be attracted to is the seaman, who is a man, and Orlando, who at the time is gendered as a man. Based on the above paragraphs, one can argue that even if *Orlando* portrays bi/pansexuality stereotypical in some regards, many of the stereotypes are successfully avoided in the novel, making it possible to argue that the portrayal is in many regards respectful.

Summarily, this chapter began by showing how *Orlando* can be read as having anticipated Julia Serano's thoughts about intrinsic inclinations. This is partly in contrast with other scholars who have argued that the novel anticipates Butler's ideas regarding performative gender. The way *Orlando* mirrors the theory of intrinsic inclinations violates the heterosexual matrix in a significant way, since the matrix stipulates that sexuality follows from gender which follows from sex, but Serano's theory claims that gender is made up of three different and not necessarily connected aspects: gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality. Therefore, the idea of intrinsic inclinations is a queer idea, and makes it easier to be respectful regarding transgender individuals, instead of claiming that their gender identity would be false or constructed by their gender expression.

Regarding gender expression, the novel shows many breaks with the heterosexual matrix, largely focussed around Orlando. Orlando is both described as androgynous, as well as simply feminine or masculine. The androgyny is both the "idealized synthesis" (Showalter, in Craps) which is critiqued in an article for being a retreat to patriarchal norms, as well as a fluctuation between femininity and masculinity. The feminine traits are often described when Orlando lives as a man, and the masculine traits are often described when Orlando lives as a woman. In general, Orlando's queerness relating to gender identity is described in a positive tone, which is also true for the character Shelmerdine whom Orlando later marries. In contrast to this, other characters who violate the heterosexual matrix's demand that their gender expression should follow their gender identity are described either as racialized Others or hideous and ridiculous caricatures of trans women, Sasha and Arch Duke/Duchess Harry/Harriet respectively. This shows that although the novel subverts gender norms, it shows that this is only acceptable in some cases. The first condition is that the character should be of Western decent, which disqualifies Sasha. The second condition is that the character should not be a man trying to look like a woman, as Arch Duke Harry does, and if one does so one should only be allowed to do so if one magically changes one's sex, as Orlando does. This creates a disrespectful binary between "false" transgender women and "real" transgender women. Not only does Harriet/Harry fit the trope of the "pathetic transsexual" because of their ridiculous

description, they are also described as fitting the “deceptive transsexual” trope, trying to engage sexually with Orlando by dressing as a woman, something that is described as rather repulsive, which of course is disrespectful. In short, it seems that although Harriet and Orlando are both queer in very similar ways, only the former of these characters is constructed as an object, while the latter is allowed to remain a subject.

It also seems as if Woolf has used “they” as a singular pronoun in some parts of the novel, which makes it easier to read it as a singular gender-neutral pronoun in most places, especially the often quoted passage after the transition scene. Further, on the topic of pronouns, the novel’s narrator claims that the pronoun “she” is only used for convention’s sake after Orlando’s transition, which makes it possible to argue that “he” was also only used because of convention. Perhaps, especially since it is stated that the transition did nothing to alter Orlando’s identity, Orlando never was a man. There are also passages in the novel which can be read as describing transphobic and cisnormative violence, which transgender individuals sadly have to deal with in real life. The inclusion of a fictionalised representation of such oppression can be labelled as respectful since it highlights real world problems.

Orlando is also very queer regarding sexuality, breaking the heterosexual matrix by not being heterosexual. They experience attraction to characters of many different genders, and can easily be described as pansexual or bisexual with today’s terms. This is evidenced by Orlando being attracted to people of more than one gender, for example Sasha and Shelmerdine. While Orlando does not seem to fit with any of the general stereotypes regarding bisexuality, it is possible to argue that this character fulfils the stereotype of trans people being naturally bisexual because of their trans status, as explained by Shiri Eisner. This becomes even more pressing when one reads the previous scholars who sometimes argue that Orlando’s transition made subversive desire possible. Also, the character Harry/Harriet can be argued to fit into this trope. Towards the end of the novel, Orlando who lives as a woman marries a man, but even though this relationship might seem heteronormative and monogamous at a first glance, it does in fact subvert many norms, as explained previously in this chapter. Regarding queer sexuality in *Orlando*, it seems like it is mostly described in a respectful way, except for when it intersects with trans issues.

In what ways is *Orlando* queer? It is queer regarding the view of gender, as discussion of intrinsic inclinations shows; it is queer regarding gender expression; it is queer regarding sexuality. Although many of these queer instances are described in a respectful fashion, it is often conditionally respectful, such as the subversion of gender norms should be done by Western nobles who magically transition from one type of physical body to another. Another

condition is that bisexuality and pansexuality should only be described in a somewhat respectful fashion if the character exhibiting the sexuality fulfils the conditions of subversion of gender norms, and even then it is possible to argue that the description of bisexuality is done as a result of the gender subversion, which is a disrespectful trope. In general, *Orlando* seems to vacillate between respectfulness and disrespectfulness, and it is hard to reach a final conclusion. Perhaps, the best one can conclude is that some of the portrayals of queerness are respectful while others are not.

One should also note that *Orlando* can be argued to be an important queer novel, because it shows that being queer is not a new phenomenon, but instead that it has existed for hundreds of years. While contemporary discourse tries to portray queerness as something new, *Orlando* shows that queerness has long been present. Not only did people exhibit other sexual orientations than heterosexual in the beginning of the 20th century when the novel was written and published, it is also shown that gender binaries and presumed heterosexuality was challenged long before that, for example, when Orlando transitions from being gendered as man to being gendered as female. This highlighting of a queer literary history, both fictional queerness and queer authors, can be seen as a mirroring of early feminist literary studies, which focussed on uncovering a female literary history. In Felski's words, this can be argued to "rewrite and extend, rather than negate, history" (345), in an effort to counter the tendency of "occasionally play[ing] with the trope of transsexuality" and instead respecting "those others for whom it is a matter of life or death" (347). Queer literary studies might still be quite new, but it seems as if transgender literary studies are even more recent, and the hope is that the above discussion has helped with creating a more stable foundation for future studies in both these disciplines, however small the impact of the present essay might be.

Conclusion

In this section, I will summarise the findings from the previous sections, and the conclusions which can be drawn from the discussion of them. The section will begin with summarising what the essay does in the different sections, and focus on an attempt of synthesising the whole essay into coherent answers for the two research questions, as well as make suggestions for further research.

This essay's main argument has been that while *Orlando* is a very queer novel, it is not always respectful in the portrayals of said queerness. While many of the queer characters are shown as objects through the narrative tone, only conditional respect is offered to other characters, with the protagonist being the character which is treated most respectfully.

Previous research on *Orlando* has leaned on a performative view of gender, which has resulted in a less nuanced analysis of the different components of gender, for example, conflating gender expression with gender identity. Furthermore, it has sometimes resulted in treating transgenderism only as a theoretical trope while disregarding whether or not this is respectful for actual transgender individuals.

In order to counter these tendencies, the present essay relies on Julia Serano's theory of intrinsic inclinations, a theory of gender which solves many of the problems with both a biologist and a performative view of gender. Furthermore, the essay employs a list of stereotypes regarding transgender individuals, as well as a list of stereotypes regarding bisexuality and pansexuality.

The method of analysis is demarcating passages in the text where characters violate the heterosexual matrix, and these passages are labelled as queer. The queer passages are compared to the stereotypes and tropes, in order to analyse to what degree these were respectful portrayals of queerness.

Among the disrespectful tendencies are the fact that queer characters from the East are portrayed in accordance to racist stereotypes, for example, the East as less evolved and therefore less sexually dimorphic, something Kaivola discusses in her article. Both *Orlando* and *Arch Duchess Harriet* could be labelled as trans in some ways, but it seems as if the latter is only included in order to be laughed at while the former is treated with respect.

Regarding further research, it would, of course, be possible to expand on the same topic as this essay has, in a format that allows for a more elaborate discussion. *Orlando* is a novel which is full of queer elements. At the same time, it would also be very interesting to apply

the same theoretical framework to other texts, and perhaps especially older texts in order to unveil the more of queer literary history. Transgender studies is a topic which is often overlooked, or written about by researchers who are not interested in being respectful regarding the experiences of actual transgender individuals, and therefore it is important for more research which is sensitive to these topics to be written. The same is true for pansexual and bisexual readings of literary works, since both of these sexualities are very often erased and instead labelled as either heterosexual or homosexual, or at best “ambiguous”. Literary scholarship needs to move away from the binary of man – woman, and realise that there are more gender identities than that, and realise that there are more sexualities than the binary of heterosexual – homosexual.

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