

Virginia Woolf Contests Gender Essentialism - Phallogocentric Discourse in “Orlando”

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Abstract: *The article unfolds a narrative subversion of the Gendered discourse, alluding to the performativity and fluidity of both Biological sex and Cultural gender.*

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Virginia Woolf contests Gender Essentialism-Phallogocentric discourse in “Orlando.” The multiple identities and their polymorphous significations (androgynous) are embodied in the “Subversive Repetition” of Orlando’s gender performativity. (1)

The theatrical-Camp Drag of Orlando’s gender performance is entrenched in his sexual desires. Gendered epithet inaugurating the text, “He” and Biographer’s ironic idea of disguises establish the textual defoliation of gendered discourse. The liminality in Orlando’s redefinition of the “Metaphysics of Substance,” is not entrenched in Anatomical Determinism. Sasha’s ambiguous gender liminality confounds Orlando, her loose tunic-Russian trouser resist the sartorial affirmation. Orlando’s failed blazon is gender liminal.

Orlando’s Turkey Tour initiates textual discourse on exotic-Racial Hermaphroditism. (2) Orlando’s masquerade in Exotic clothes makes him almost ungendered. The sex change metamorphoses-“he was a woman” is a gender parody. The culturally produced-Naked body of Orlando transmutes itself in a banal narrative proving to be no epiphany or change of identity. Orlando’s gender liminality transcends corporeal transitions. “The change of sex...nothing...to alter their identity.”

The politics of pronouns destabilizes Ritualistic sex change and destroys the affirmative-gendered pronoun by using the queer “their” as a mark of transition for Orlando from “his” to “her.” Gender plurality dislodges the teleologically gendered language-representation. Power in masculine pronoun is contested by Mock-Biographer’s interjection.

The Gipsies dissolve ontological gender boundaries in gender amorphous spaces. Orlando never contemplates her gendered identity with the Gipsies but only her racial otherness.

Clothes burdened her with the social expectations of gendered behaviour. The interior-exterior voyage to England revealed shifting gender alignments, Orlando affiliated with both women-men in “Androgynous Wholeness.” (Sandra Gilbert)

Cross-dressing became her response to Gendered expectations and transvestism as theatrical representation of Gender Liminality, conspicuous in moments of intersexual-

ungendered-Hermaphroditism in Orlando. “...one sex against other...not sure to which she belonged”

Dissolution of gender in feminine realm as femininity allowed for more intersectional Gender liminalities and hence an explicit destruction than masculinity.(3)

The major law suits reiterated, anachronistically, the Foucauldian Juridical-hegemonic power sources to curb gender liminality. However the “Incognito/Incognita” phase ironically accentuated her transvestism.

“Archduchess...behold--in her place...tall gentleman in black.” Orlando and Queer Harry/Harriet “acted the parts of man and woman...then fell into natural discourse.” The novel’s “Subversive repetition” furthered Gender Liminality. Harry/Harriet embodies the transvestite notion of Drag or Ultra Gender performance. The performative-liminality is furthered in Orlando’s meeting with Nell.

Orlando represents a trans-historical/literary-feminist historiography of Gender Liminality-homoeroticism disputed by the Nineteenth century. The “Tertiary Sex Characteristics” as Judith Lorber puts it, are categorised to compulsive heterosexuality and the Crinoline-wedding ring Imprisonment. However her marriage with Shelmerdine, parodying Gendered Romances, intensifies the Gender Trouble. She sceptically accepts the Zeitgeist but to continue writing and eventually dismember the former.

Woolf’s questioning of Male Intellectualism challenges the gendered literary discourse, symbolized in her grotesque representation Of Pope. Orlando’s gender identities-creative endeavours are mutually problematic. (4) The “Oak Tree” refuses gender essentialism-market capitalism and creates a gender liminal comic sublime for an alternative-aesthetic alternative.(5)

“...write of a woman, everything is out of place...” The mock biographer disembarks gender-generic binaries of a female Bildungsroman. Orlando evades the gender-generic boundaries. The stable monolithic-gendered subject is disowned by Orlando’s multiple self to draw a feminine inflection on Modernism by loosening the untameable ‘wild goose...’

The “Cariacature value” imposed on gender is to recuperate what Katerina Mitakou calls the “Maternal Impasse” as in “A room of One’s Own.”

References

- [1] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble
- [2] Celia Daileader, Othello's Sister: Racial Hermaphroditism and Appropriation in Virginia Woolf's Orlando
- [3] Esther Sánchez-Pardo González, What Phantasmagoria the Mind Is: Reading Virginia Woolf's Parody of Gender
- [4] Kathryn Simpson, Gifts, Markets and Economies of Desire in Virginia Woolf
- [5] Kari Elise Lokke, Orlando and Incandescence: Virginia Woolf's Comic Sublime