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Virginia Woolf's Double Discourse

PAMELA L. CAUGHIE

> If human beings were not divided into two biological sexes, there would probably be no need for literature. And if literature could truly say what the relations between the sexes are, we would doubtless not need much of it then either.
>
> BARBARA JOHNSON
> *The Critical Difference* (13)

Written by a feminist (Virginia Woolf), for a bisexual (Vita Sackville-West), about an androgyne (Orlando), the novel *Orlando* would seem to be the quintessential feminist text. And that, indeed, is what it is in danger of becoming, just as Woolf is in danger of becoming the acclaimed Mother of Us All. In promoting Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* as a feminist work, feminist critics have picked the right text, but for the wrong reasons.[1] *Orlando* works as a feminist text not because of what it says about sexual identity but because of what it manages not to say; not because of what it reveals about the relation between the sexes but because of what it does to that relation; not because its protagonist is androgynous but because its discourse is duplicitous. With its eponymous character who changes from a man to a woman halfway through the novel, with its capricious narrator who at times speaks in the character of Orlando's male biographer and at others sounds suspiciously like *Orlando*'s female author, this novel assumes what Jane Gallop calls a "double discourse." This double discourse is one that is oscillating and open, one that "asserts and then questions," "a text that alternately quotes and comments, exercises and critiques."[2] By drawing on the Lacanian readings of Jane Gallop and Shoshana Felman, I want to offer a reading of *Orlando* that will explore its functioning as a feminist text and that will expose many feminist critics' appropriation of it.

Orlando is a biographical novel about a poet who lives and loves for over three centuries (and who is likely to live and love three more), changing from a man to a woman halfway through the novel, somewhere around the end of the seventeenth century. When discussing this novel, one must begin with this caution: anything you can say about *Orlando* can be used against you. For *Orlando* defies conclusions. The text of *Orlando* is as unstable as the sex of Orlando. The first words of the novel shake our certainty about anything in this text. We read, "He—for there could be no doubt of his sex . . . ," and immediately our doubt is aroused. The emphasis on what should be obvious makes it seem unnatural. The emphasis on an innocent pronoun makes it suspect. This novel abounds in qualifications ("Change was incessant, and change perhaps would never cease"), paradoxes ("the [blank] space is filled to repletion"), and contradictions (the androgyne itself). This sexual and textual indeterminacy links language and identity. As the androgynous Orlando brings the question of sexual identity to the fore, the obtrusive narrator brings the textual language to the fore by intruding to discuss his own art (e.g., 65), to mock his own method (e.g., 266), and to characterize his own readers (73). Orlando is identified with writing throughout: she is read like a book (25); she concludes that she is "only in the process of fabrication" (175); and she writes at her poem through four centuries, borrowing indiscriminately from different literary ages, all the while questioning "What's an 'age,' indeed?" (205).

This novel, then, is a text about writing, about constructing lives, histories, identities, and fictions. Its desire is for expression itself, as Orlando says, for the fulfillment of desire "in whatever form it comes, and may there be more forms, and stranger" (294). This fulfillment of desire, this desire for expression, encourages us to read androgyny not in terms of some innate bisexuality but in terms of the situation of desire, the subject's situation in a signifying chain. One must assume a sexual identity in order to take one's place in language, in order to express anything. Sexual identity is assumed in language; it is, as Felman says, "conditioned by the functioning of language."[3] Woolf brings out the arbitrariness of that identity, the arbitrariness of language itself, through Orlando's switching from one sex to the other, and from one poetic language to another, as well as through the shifting of her own rhetoric in this novel.

Just as Orlando's identity swings from the extreme of conventionality—Orlando as a boy slicing at the swinging Moor's head—to the extreme of eccentricity—Orlando as a woman discovering she has three sons by another woman—so the language of the text shifts from the transparent conventionality of clichés—to put it in a nutshell, by the skin of his teeth—

to the opaque originality of Orlando and her lover Shel's cypher language—Rattigan Glumphoboo. Just as the bombastic masque of the Three Sisters hyperbolizes Orlando's sex change, the self-conscious diction maximizes the language of the text, not just the self-conscious diction of Orlando's extravagant metaphors (he calls his lover a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, a fox in the snow), but the self-conscious diction of the biographer's narrative as well (he describes Orlando's betrothed as fair, florid, and phlegmatic). Just as the sexual differences are put into confusion ("You're a woman, Shel!" "You're a man, Orlando!"), so are the extremes of rhetoric. For as Woolf reveals by mocking her own "Time Passes" section of *To the Lighthouse,* what is highly original in one context can, in another, be a tedious, grandiloquent way of saying simply "time passed" (*Orlando* 97–98). What is conventional and what is original, what is mainstream and what is marginal change, like Orlando's sex, with time and circumstance. We see that identity is as variable as language, language as vulnerable as identity. Woolf's rhetoric in *Orlando* is no more chaste than is her protagonist.

What this novel expresses, then, is the difficulty of reaching conclusions about identity or language. Both are based on making distinctions, yet these distinctions are not fixed by reference to anything outside them. There is nothing "out there" to measure them against. What Woolf shares with a writer like Lacan is his verbal play meant to undercut his own position as the one presumed to know.[4] What Woolf admires in and shares with writers like Browne, De Quincey, and Montaigne is their willingness to entertain a variety of opinions, their contentment to remain in uncertainties, and their use of qualifying language to avoid "the rash assumptions of human ignorance" ("Montaigne," *The Common Reader* 64). And so, in *Orlando*, "we are now in the region of 'perhaps' and 'appears' " (102). To speak directly and with certainty on any matter is beyond the novelist Woolf as it is beyond the poet Orlando. Desperately seeking the irreducible linguistic episteme, Orlando discovers that one cannot simply say what one means and leave it: "So then he tried saying the grass is green and the sky is blue and so to propitiate the austere spirit of poetry. . . . 'The sky is blue,' he said, 'the grass is green.' Looking up, he saw that on the contrary, the sky is like the veils which a thousand Madonnas have let fall from their hair; and the grass fleets and darkens like a flight of girls fleeing the embraces of hairy satyrs from enchanted woods. 'Upon my word,' he said, . . . 'I don't see that one's more true than another. Both are utterly false' " (101–2).

As Orlando discovers, poetry and nature, language and identity, must be learned together.[5] This is the point of the vacillating rhetoric and the

epicene protagonist of Woolf's novel. Orlando's identity, like her poem, is a palimpsest. It is "compounded of many humours," composed of "odds and ends," a "meeting-place of dissemblables" (73, 176). Orlando continually wavers between beliefs, changes or disguises her sex, moves in harmony with and at odds with the times. So too Woolf's novel offers support for differing positions without arguing for any one. She writes: "Society is the most powerful concoction in the world and society has no existence whatsoever" (194); there is not much difference between the sexes, for Orlando remains "fundamentally the same" throughout, and the difference is "one of great profundity" (138, 188); "Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath," and clothes "wear us," changing "our view of the world and the world's view of us" (187–88). Such oscillations on the thematic and narrative levels of this novel are presented metaphorically in the recurring image of the perpetually swaying arras and in the alternation of light and dark in Orlando's cab ride with Alexander Pope. It is in the midst of all these contrarieties, in the midst of such violent shifts in viewpoint, that Woolf offers her famous androgynous statement, not as a metaphysical or feminist theory, not as a resolution to or a synthesis of contrarieties, but as a way to remain suspended between opposed beliefs: "For here again we come to a dilemma. 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" (189). Androgyny embodies this oscillation between positions. It figures a basic ambiguity, not only a sexual ambiguity but a textual one as well. Androgyny is a refusal to choose.[6]

And yet so many critics choose androgyny as the appropriate textual strategy or the appropriate sexual identity. In praising Woolf's *Orlando* for its presentation of transsexualism and its theory of androgyny, most critics have tended to take Woolf's statements out of their context in this novel and to cite them as unambiguous truths about sexual identity or modernist-feminist novels. The androgynous Orlando is appropriated as a symbol of the more unified self, or as a resolution to the problem of true self and conventional self. "Androgynous wholeness" is the phrase Sandra Gilbert uses (119, 127). Androgyny becomes a form of self-mastery, a metaphor for the autonomous self, a freedom from history, society, language. Yet such readings fail to grasp the concept of identity in *Orlando* because they fail to attend to its rhetoric.

In *Orlando*, androgyny and transsexualism call into question not just conventional assumptions about sexuality, but, more important, conventional assumptions about language itself. In its rhetorical transports, Woolf's

novel challenges the reference theory of meaning. In particular, it questions the notion that words get their meanings from things they refer to; the definition of words and categories by their essential traits; and the isolation of words and statements from their contexts of use in order to interpret them. The point of focusing on the marginal case (e.g., the transsexual) is to reveal the crucial decisions made in the application of a term or in the assumption of an identity. We can see this point most clearly in the famous clothes philosophy passage in Chapter Four, the passage often cited as Woolf's theory of androgyny.

Now a woman and living in the eighteenth century, Orlando in this chapter is becoming acutely aware of her sex as she faces a legal challenge to her property rights, as she parries the advances of the ship's captain and the Archduke, and as she contends with "the coil of skirts about her legs" (153). Initially unchanged by the sex change, or so her biographer tells us, Orlando is now assuming a more feminine nature. Her biographer writes: "The change of clothes had, some philosophers will say, much to do with it. Vain trifles as they seem, . . . they change our view of the world and the world's view of us" (187). According to this philosophy, our identity is as changeable as our apparel. Clothes make the man, or the woman. The difference between men, and between men and women, would seem to be a superficial one. However, the biographer continues: "That is the view of some philosophers and wise ones, but on the whole, we incline to another. The difference between the sexes is, happily, one of great profundity. Clothes are but the symbol of something hid deep beneath. It was a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a woman's dress and a woman's sex" (188). That is, clothes don't *make* the woman, clothes *mark* the woman beneath. But again, the biographer continues, and two sentences later we find the famous androgyny passage cited above: "For here again, we come to a dilemma. 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," (189).

Placed in its context, this paragraph not only contradicts the earlier assertion that Orlando's sex change had not affected his/her identity, and that other philosophy that says we put on our identity with our clothing, but it also contradicts itself. For the biographer begins by saying that clothes are a symbol of something deep beneath, that is, one's nature or identity, and ends by remarking that often what is deep beneath is the opposite of the clothing above. In other words, the passage asserts both that clothes are natural and fitting and that clothes are arbitrary and de-

ceiving. Such a self-contradiction is not in the least surprising in this particular novel. What is surprising is that in appropriating this statement as Woolf's theory of androgyny, critics pass over the contradictions, accepting the statement at face value, taking the biographer at his word, which is to take his discourse for granted.

If we consider this passage within its eighteenth-century context, we see that Woolf is not arguing for one of two ontological theories—that is, that identity is fixed or it is changeable, that sexual differences are natural or they are learned—but presenting two positions in eighteenth-century thought which come out of a particular conception of language. On the one hand, we have Samuel Johnson's position: thought must be distinguished from rhetoric, the content from the form, the man from his attire. On the other hand, we have Alexander Pope's position: the rhetoric makes the thought, the form and content are inseparable, the man must dress to advantage. On the one hand, clothes are vain trifles and rhetoric is superfluous; on the other hand, clothes are expressive and rhetoric is essential.

But these apparently opposing views are grounded in the same assumptions about language and identity. To speak of rhetoric as either revealing or concealing, to speak of appearance as either natural or contrived, is to set up a false opposition. It is to assume that we can get beyond or beneath the linguistic paradigm, in which rhetorical and sexual differences function. Such assumptions about language and identity imply the possibility of a natural or naked state or status. Thus, when Sandra Gilbert offers us the choice of stripping away "costumes (and selves) to reveal the pure, sexless (or third-sexed) being behind gender and myth" (214–15), she assumes a pure, free ontological essence which we can locate and define prior to its insertion into language, society, culture. Proving the contrary is precisely the point of the vacillating rhetoric and epicene protagonist of Woolf's novel.

In *Orlando,* clothing, identity, and rhetoric are not an ornamentation of something prior, but an orientation to something else. What matters is not what they mask or mark, but what they enable the protagonist or the writer to accomplish. That is, what matters is not the *nature* of the sign, the transsexual, but its position and function within a particular discursive situation. And so, we must attend to the production of the androgynous Orlando, not to her properties.[7] If we return to that clothes philosophy passage, we see that in trying to distinguish the ways in which Orlando has changed with the sex change and how Orlando embodies traits of both sexes, the biographer ends up making stereotypical remarks, for he can make such sexual distinctions only by relying on conventional

assumptions about sexual difference. His only recourse, then, is to look at the particular case: "but here we leave the general question [of sexual difference] and note only the odd effect it had on the particular case of Orlando herself" (189). We, too, must attend to the particular case rather than the general category. What we need in order to read this novel is a conceptual model that enables us to discuss the androgyne not in terms of its relation to the self beneath or the world beyond, but in terms of the multiple and shifting relations among signifying systems, such as rhetoric, fashion, gender, and genre.

Thus, we must attend not only to the various relations among changing historical periods and rhetorical styles, but also to the changing sexual metaphors as well. By employing three metaphors for sexual identity in *Orlando*—androgyny, transvestism, and transsexualism—Woolf shows us that there are different ways of talking about identity, different kinds of appropriateness, different functions of language. When we fail to specify the kinds of distinctions we are relying on (as Sandra Gilbert does in equating these metaphors), our conclusions become suspect. Woolf knows all too well that any language she can use is already embroiled in certain conventional assumptions about gender and identity. Her solution, changing metaphors for sexual identity, is less a freedom from a gendered reality than a freedom from referential thinking. Such freedom comes about by a change in our conception of language. What is at issue here is a language that sets up opposing alternatives and one that plays out various relations. Such an epicene novel is possible when different functions of language are tested out rather than one being taken for granted.

The androgyne, as Felman says, is "constituted in ambiguity" and therefore is not representative of any "single signified" (32). The androgyne threatens meaning by breaking down those oppositions that allow us to make meaningful distinctions. It calls attention to and calls into question one way of making meaning, the institution of representation. Androgyny is not a freedom from the tyranny of sex, as Maria DiBattista says, so much as a freedom from the tyranny of reference. The shifting and blurring of sexual identities, like the shifting and blurring of literary genres, periods, and styles, disrupts meaning brought about by fixed polarities, by defined standards, by rigid categories, by "rhetorical hierarchy" (Felman's phrase). Sex and text are rhetorical terms; they function not only according to certain grammatical and syntactical patternings and social norms but also rhetorically and historically. They are constructed according to a particular model of language. To put sexual identity and textual meaning into confusion, as Woolf does in *Orlando,* is to disclose the dependence of sexual traits and literary standards on certain kinds of discourse. Because one

cannot locate innate sexual traits or essential literary values in the face of changing attitudes, conventions, and paradigms (whether scientific, literary, or psychological), one must continually posit and undermine, affirm and doubt, "yield and resist" (155). Oscillation is the rhythm of *Orlando;* oscillating exploration is its method.

Far from defeating sexual difference, as many feminist critics claim, *Orlando* enacts it, enshrines it, exploits it, makes a spectacle of it, but as a playful oscillation not a stable opposition. The androgynous self in *Orlando* is a metaphor for the dramatic, the role-playing self. Androgyny is a metaphor for change, for openness, for a self-conscious acting out of intentions. It is not an ideal *type,* but a contextual *response.* Identity is always disguised in *Orlando* not because the "true self" is running around "incognito or incognita as the case might turn out to be" (168) but because identity is a series of roles. And successive roles subvert referential poles (Felman 31). In this sense, *Orlando* presents a Lacanian view of identity. Woolf no more than Lacan tries to *define* female identity, for any identity assumed finally, definitively, essentially will be constraining; any identity deemed authentic, appropriate, natural will be illusory. Yet Orlando does not *transcend* identity any more than Woolf advocates a gender-free reality, as Sandra Gilbert asserts. For one cannot deny the reality of gender or the necessity of identity. "Identity," Gallop writes, "must be continually assumed and immediately called into question" (xii), just as expression must be exercised and at once critiqued. Divesting Orlando of property and patronym, putting her paternity and propriety into question, Woolf does not liberate her identity but refuses the categories by which it is fixed, determined, legalized. *Orlando* "compromises the coherence" of sexuality and textuality (see Felman 31). Its open-endedness, its openness to other literary texts, resists closure and containment, refuses to provide a conclusive and thus an exclusive statement.[8] *Orlando* shows us how sexuality and textuality perform in the world; it does not tell us what they are or what they should be. What Woolf defies in this novel is any attempt to *define* writing or identity by definitive standards to which it conforms or from which it deviates.

In her diary Woolf refers to *Orlando* as her "play side."[9] It refuses to stop the play of speculation with a consistent argument or theory. The play side is concerned with writing as pleasure, not as production. As Woolf wrote in her typescript of "Professions for Women": "When people said to me what is the use of your trying to write? I could say truthfully, I write not for use, but for pleasure" (*Pargiters* 7). When Orlando admires the anonymous writers who built the house of literature, she means those writers who wrote with no practical purpose in mind, whether to protest

or to proselytize, but only out of the love of writing. For too long we have downplayed the play side of Virginia Woolf as displayed in such works as *Orlando, A Room of One's Own,* and *Flush.* We have turned her play side into a meaningful representation, into an alternative or an appropriate form. But as Ionesco once cautioned, any established form of expression can become a form of oppression, can become authoritative, can become, in Gallop's words, "a position and a possession." Orlando and Woolf neither reject past aesthetic standards nor prescribe new ones. They take from the literary past what is useful to them, use up standards, dispose of them, and thus expose them as provisional and changeable, disclose their dependence on certain contexts. Enacting a type of discourse rather than codifying one, as Woolf does in *Orlando,* exposes the supposed universality of aesthetic standards of value. By questioning various metaphysical positions, by testing out various narrative strategies, Woolf produces not "stable assumptions" but "contextual associations" (Gallop 64). She disrupts our tendency to see language as the transparent medium of communication; she defies our habit of looking through discourse to representation. It is not that *Orlando*'s playful surface has no point to it; its point is its playful surface. It is time this play side of Woolf's writing be accounted for in terms of different conceptions of self, language, and reality—in terms of a dramatic self not an appropriate one, in terms of a performative view of language not a cognitive one, in terms of a rhetorical reality not a referential one.

It is not, then, that the appropriate identity is androgynous, but that the androgyne defies an appropriate, a definable, identity. Androgyny in *Orlando* is not so much a psychosexual category as a rhetorical strategy, less a condition than a motive. Androgyny does not *substitute for* anything; for that would be to fix it, possess it, universalize it. The androgyne defeats the norm, the universal, the stereotype that Woolf feared becoming, as she so often expresses in her diaries: "I will go on adventuring, changing, opening my mind and my eyes, refusing to be stamped and stereotyped" (*A Writer's Diary* 206). The stereotype, says Roland Barthes, is "the word repeated without any magic, any enthusiasm, as though it were natural, as though by some miracle this recurring word were adequate on each occasion for different reasons" (*The Pleasure of the Text* 42) or, I might add, on different occasions for the same reason. To continue with Barthes's terminology, the androgyne, unlike the stereotype or the norm, is neither consistent nor insistent; it is perverse.

By taking the androgynous personality out of its context in this novel, by turning it into an alternative to or a substitute for the conventional character of the traditional novel or for the conventional self of patriarchal

society, so many feminist critics run the risk of reducing it to a platitude.[10] They risk turning a text that works to undo norms, stereotypes, and standards into a new norm, what Gallop calls a "normalizing moralism" or "a comforting representation." The problem with the platitude, the norm, the stereotype is not that they are false or trite in themselves but that they are false or trite in being detached from the contexts that gave rise to them. As Woolf shows in *Orlando,* what enables Alexander Pope's scathing remark on the character of women (a remark so famous that the narrator need not repeat it) to survive to shape future attitudes toward women is its being loosed from its generating context, which was this: Orlando inadvertently offended Mr. Pope by dropping a sugar cube "with a great plop" into his tea (214). A witty remark may be a petty retort. Unmoored from their contexts, literary standards, sexual traits, and social values appear to be incontestable; yet they are responses to particular historical and rhetorical situations. Taking Woolf's statement about androgyny out of its context in *Orlando,* repeating it as an unambiguous truth about human nature, trivializes it. What gives the concept its force are the contextual, textual, and sexual relationships in which it plays its part. "If you cannot give something up for something of like value," Gallop writes, "if you consider it nonsubstitutable, then you don't possess it any more than it possesses you" (76). We need to look at what Woolf *does* in a particular text and context, not at what her writing *represents* for all times or for all women.

Like Orlando herself, her critics must avoid the tyranny or folly of sex pride (160).[11] They must avoid setting up a feminist referential in place of a masculinist one. They must resist reestablishing a natural, even necessary, relation between self and narrative when they have exposed such a relation as arbitrary and provisional in conventional novels.

What *Orlando* presents, then, is not a metaphysical theory but a play of forms. Woolf's androgynous vision affirms Gallop's "permanent alternation," a persistent oscillation, as our binocular vision allows us to see both duck and rabbit in Wittgenstein's sample sketch (*Philosophical Investigations,* II, section xi). The double discourse of *Orlando* enables Woolf to set up exchanges between opposing positions, between different orders of discourse.[12] What appears to be an opposition between positions is tolerated as difference without belligerence, as different options on a spectrum of possibilities, not a *choice* of position but a *doubling* of vision. The double discourse enables Woolf to present a bistable vision, not a univocal theory. This double discourse does not deny a feminist reading. As Gallop says, "This problem of dealing with difference without constituting an opposition may just be what feminism is all about" (93). Woolf's

gesture in *Orlando* is much like Gallop's in *The Daughter's Seduction:* she undercuts her own writing, or as Woolf puts it, mocks her own lyric vein (*Writer's Diary* 104); she changes her viewpoint; she alters her narrative voice. The ironic, mocking tone, the vacillating narrative voice, and the pastiche of literary allusions in *Orlando* check our efforts to read for a personal argument, check our tendency to take Woolf at her word, which is to take her discourse for granted. The double discourse, in Felman's terms its "play of undecidability," encourages us to suspend our analytical, judicial, end-seeking, purposive reading for the delight in speculation, equivocation, rhetoric, and play. Feminist readings of *Orlando* read only the law, or the counterlaw, of this novel, not its desire.[13] They stress the purposive and polemical over the playful and pleasurable. They would suppress the very multiplicity and flexibility by means of which Woolf defies authority, systems that shut out (*Writer's Diary* 183), and "the desire to make others believe as [she] believes" (149). *Orlando* is feminist not in what its language says but in what its discourse achieves. *Orlando* gives us not a theory of androgyny but a performance.

If androgyny were a triumph over the tyranny of sex (Maria DiBattista), a resolution to the contradictions between female and male (Rachel DuPlessis), or a transcendence of a gendered reality (Sandra Gilbert), then in writing *Orlando* Woolf would more than likely have defeated the need for literature, for sex cannot be separated from text, the grammatical from the gendered. Orlando's androgyny and diuturnity are not a testament to some essential and enduring human nature but an affirmation of adaptation and change and of the life-sustaining impulse to create fictions. The novel ends at the present moment, the moment of Woolf's writing ("Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-eight"), with Orlando's sighting of the wild goose: "It is the goose!" Orlando cried. "The wild goose . . ." The wild goose and the ellipsis assure us that nothing is concluded, that the chase will continue. We can only respond, "Encore!"

Notes

1. Some feminist critics I'm referring to are Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers;* Sandra M. Gilbert, "Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature"; and Maria DiBattista, *Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon.* But the reading of *Orlando* and of androgyny that I take issue with throughout is a common one in Woolf and feminist criticism.

2. Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis,* 122, 126. All references to *Orlando* are to the Harcourt Brace Jovanovich paperback edition.
3. Shoshana Felman, "Rereading Femininity." I wrote this essay before reading Mary Jacobus's *Reading Woman.* In her introduction, Jacobus presents a reading of *Orlando* that is similar to my own, drawing as I do on Felman's essay.
4. See Jacqueline Rose's introduction to Lacan's *Feminine Sexuality,* 50.
5. Thomas Kuhn writes that "nature and words are learned together" in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 191. In Chapter Two of *Orlando,* the narrator remarks that the change in language and prose style in the seventeenth century is accompanied by a change in external conditions, such as in the natural landscape, in the character traits, and in the sewage system of London (113).
6. To say androgyny is a refusal to choose is not to deny the *possibility* of choice.
7. See Jacobus's first chapter, which contains a similar discussion of this novel in terms of language and clothing. See also Felman's "Rereading Femininity" in which she discusses sexual identity as "conditioned by the functioning of language" (29).
8. The narrator of *Orlando* often leads us to a big conclusion, and then omits it: "and so at last she reached her final conclusion, which was of the highest importance but which, as we have already much overpassed our limit of six lines, we must omit" (291). Other examples of this device can be found on pages 253 and 271.
9. Woolf, *A Writer's Diary,* 134. In this entry (November 7, 1928), Woolf comments on one effect of this play side: "I rather think the upshot will be books that relieve other books; a variety of styles and subjects: for after all, that is my temperament, I think, to be very little persuaded of the truth of anything . . ."
10. This is a characteristic tendency not only of feminist readings of *Orlando* but of feminist readings of the androgyne in women's literature in general. See, for example, DuPlessis's *Writing beyond the Ending.*
11. In "Women Novelists," Woolf writes: "any emphasis, either of pride or of shame, laid consciously upon the sex of a writer is not only irritating but superfluous. . . . a woman's writing is always feminine; it cannot help being feminine: the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine" (*Women and Writing* 70). Woolf's feminism, like Lacan's psychoanalysis, does not produce definitions but tries to account for how definitions are produced. See Rose's introduction to *Feminine Sexuality,* 57, and Jacobus's *Reading Woman,* 20–21.
12. The double discourse, like our binocular vision, gives us not just additional information but a different *kind* of information, a different way of organizing or processing what we experience. The shortsightedness of many feminist appropriations of *Orlando* comes from incorporating its double discourse into a monostable vision, into the one-to-one correspondence model of the reference theory of meaning. Rather than representing a new concept of self and

narrative, *Orlando* presents a different way of conceiving of the various relationships both within and between self and narrative. It does not represent a type; it enacts relations. (For a discussion of the binocular vision, see Gregory Bateson's *Mind and Nature.*)

13. It is the Law that gives *meaning* to sexual difference. *Orlando,* though, is not answering the question of the *meaning* of sexuality; it is exploring, as Felman puts it, the complex relations between sexuality and meaning. See Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness,* 156.

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