



**UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DA PARAÍBA  
DEPARTAMENTO DE LETRAS E ARTES  
CURSO DE LICENCIATURA PLENA EM LETRAS**

**ANTONIO ALAN HERCULANO TOLENTINO**

**ANDROGYNY AND THE BUILDING OF GENDER BALANCE IN VIRGINIA  
WOOLF'S *ORLANDO***

**CAMPINA GRANDE  
MAIO DE 2018**

**Antonio Alan Herculano Tolentino**

**ANDROGYNY AND THE BUILDING OF GENDER  
BALANCE IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *ORLANDO***

Monografia de conclusão de curso  
apresentada ao Departamento de Letras e  
Artes da Universidade Estadual da Paraíba  
como requisito para a obtenção do grau de  
Licenciatura Plena em Letras Inglês.

**Orientador: Prof. Ms. Valécio Irineu Barros**

**Orientando: Antonio Alan Herculano Tolentino**

**CAMPINA GRANDE  
MAIO DE 2018**

É expressamente proibido a comercialização deste documento, tanto na forma impressa como eletrônica. Sua reprodução total ou parcial é permitida exclusivamente para fins acadêmicos e científicos, desde que na reprodução figure a identificação do autor, título, instituição e ano do trabalho.

T649a Tolentino, Antonio Alan Herculano.  
Androgyny and the Building of Gender Blance in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. [manuscrito] / Antonio Alan Herculano Tolentino. - 2018.  
24 p.  
Digitado.  
Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso (Graduação em Letras Inglês) - Universidade Estadual da Paraíba, Centro de Educação, 2018.  
"Orientação : Prof. Me. Valécio Irineu Barros, Coordenação do Curso de Letras Inglês - CEDUC."  
1. Androginia. 2. Sexo. 3. Gênero. 4. Feminismo. 5. Análise do discurso. I. Título

21. ed. CDD 401.41

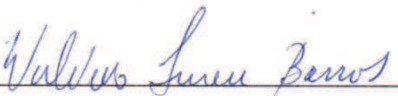
**Antonio Alan Herculano Tolentino**

**ANDROGYNY AND THE BUILDING OF GENDER BALANCE IN VIRGINIA  
WOOLF'S *ORLANDO***

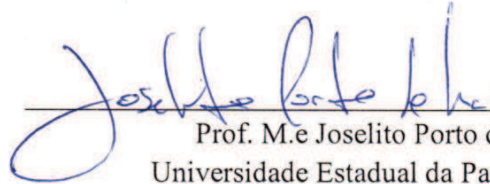
Monografia de conclusão de curso apresentada ao  
Departamento de Letras e Artes da Universidade  
Estadual da Paraíba como requisito para a obtenção  
do grau de Licenciatura Plena em Letras Inglês.

Média: 10,0


Data de aprovação: 30 de 05 de 2018

 Nota 10,0

Prof. M.e. Valecio Irineu Barros (Orientador)  
Universidade Estadual da Paraíba (UEPB)

 Nota 10,0

Prof. M.e Joselito Porto de Lucena  
Universidade Estadual da Paraíba (UEPB)

 Nota 10,0

Prof<sup>a</sup>. M.<sup>a</sup> Iá Niani Belo Maia  
Universidade Estadual da Paraíba (UEPB)

## Summary

Introduction -----	6
Virginia Woolf and Feminism -----	8
Virginia Woolf and the androgynous mind -----	9
Speaking of sex and Gender -----	12
Orlando and the flight to androgyny -----	14
Conclusion -----	22
Bibliography -----	24

## RESUMO

Androginia é um tema recorrente na obra de Virginia Woolf e desempenha um papel importante no desenvolvimento do enredo de *Orlando: Uma Biografia*. O objetivo desse artigo é analisar as estratégias que Woolf utiliza no romance, a fim de retratar a relação social de gênero e expressar sua descrença no determinismo biológico, que dita que o gênero está relacionado ao sexo. Tomando por base as teorias de Judith Butler (1999), Carolyn Heilbrun (1983) e Elaine Showalter (1978, 1989), esse estudo tentará responder à seguinte pergunta: Até que ponto a mudança de sexo de Orlando lhe possibilita acessar suas qualidades andróginas?

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Androginia, sexo, gênero, feminismo, ambiguidade

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Virginia Woolf was an important writer during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She was the daughter of the biographer Leslie Stephens and she was brought up amidst books and the presence of the literary personalities of her time. But due to the restrict norms of gender of the Victorian Era women were prevented from living a life of their own. They were prisoners of the male figure which was represented by the father or the husband. Virginia Woolf felt on her own skin the patriarchal tyranny of her time for her father reproduced such behavior preventing her from going to university and later in the future she knew he would not allow her to be the artist she wanted to. This anxiety of being dependent of male criticism led women to vindicate the same rights as men and at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the feminist movement arose around the globe.

As an artist, Virginia Woolf expressed her feminist ideals and attempted, throughout her works, to minimize the differences between the sexes. She believed that in order for creation to take place there must happen a union, a fusion of masculine and feminine elements, one-sidedness caused a prison of gender and to escape this prison one should be androgynous like the protagonist of her novel *Orlando: A Biography*, who will be analyzed in this article.

Heilbrun defines androgyny as

a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women, be aggressive, as men, tender, it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom (1982,p.x-xi),

the nature of androgyny is best evoked by Virginia Woolf in her books *A Room of one's own* and *Orlando*. The latter is an intriguing and extravagant book; it was written in the first flush of enthusiasm, as a kind of hymn to androgyny. The idea of androgyny takes over as a central point in the plot, taking the form of a provocative confusion of the sexes. In the middle of the novel Orlando miraculously changes sex, and this change leads Woolf to comment on the relations between the sexes. As the narrator comments that Orlando:

was censuring both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither ; and indeed , for the time being she seemed to vacillate; she was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets , shared the weakness of each. It was a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind to be in. (WOOLF,2004,p. 58).

The aim of the book is to capture Orlando's joining of the two sides of her nature in cooperation, in other words, attaining perfect androgyny.

For the contemporary reader *Orlando: A Biography* depicts the split of sex and gender which is a very debated topic nowadays. We have been witnessing a lot of people from this generation saying no to the common-sense assumption that forces one to wear blue if one is a boy or pink if one is a girl; people, embracing the freedom of choice regardless of their biological sex. In this regard a great contribution is the idea brought by Judith Butler on the third wave of feminism, of detaching sex from gender in the analysis of the concept of gender:

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one." (1999,p.09)

In other words, sex is not the ultimate feature for determining the gender. However, the hetero normative framework which is still an important rule to determine the way one must behave makes it difficult for the individual to pursue its own gender identity. In *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf was able to create an imaginary setting, in which she could overturn the hetero normative beliefs and could successfully separate gender from sex in the life of the protagonist. This observation lead us to the following problem

question: To what extent Orlando's sex change enables her access to her androgynous qualities?

Using an exploratory or bibliographic methodology, this article tries to answer this leading question based upon the works of Heilbrun (1982), Showalter (1989,1978) and Butler (1999).

## **2. VIRGINIA WOOLF AND FEMINISM**

In her novel *Orlando: A Biography* Virginia Woolf tried somehow to represent the feminine feeling by, reporting her own marginalization as a woman in a world ruled by men. Considering that her texts promote a general transformation of the norms which did not give credit to women's experiences in society, is possible to say that- her view corroborated most of the ideas advocated by the rising feminist movement.

Feminism can be defined as a political movement which targets an egalitarian society based on equal rights and roles for men and women without any differentiation on the basis of biological sex .The central element in the feminist theory is the examination of gender by interpreting of different cultural contexts and by showing different experiences of women around the world. Feminism takes into account the basic principle that the roles of gender are socially assigned and that women are forced to accept these roles and fit into them. Feminist theory targets the examination of how women are characterized as fragile, as such characterization of women as weak, passive, seductive and emotional beings shows that they are treated as sex objects fit only for reproduction. The basic political and theoretical viewpoint from feminism is that the discrimination prevailing against women is not natural but socially created.

Nowadays the impact of poststructuralist thought has resulted in a better understanding of the female and feminism from a new perspective. It does not only explore existing boundaries but deeply investigates how these boundaries were formed and accepted. Along the time feminism has changed its form and passed through different phases usually referred to as the different waves of feminism.



It is important to highlight that the first wave of feminism, which took place in the late 19th century and early 20th century, aimed at the creation of opportunities for women and that its main goal was to provide them with the right to vote and participate in politics. Modifications of divorce laws and better working quality for women were also focal points.

Woolf played an important role as one of the prominent characters who started the second wave of feminism. She strongly believed the control of universities by men were an important hindrance for the development of female researchers, something which prevented them from discovering or understanding. The male-dominated universities refused access to women's texts and promoted the male's version of women as the only and real one. In Woolf's opinion, language was gendered. Thus when a woman writes she has no option other than use the male language. About this idea, Showalter points out that "all speech is necessarily talk about gender, since every language gender is a grammatical category, and masculine is the linguistic norm" (1989,p.01), making it quite difficult for women to fully express themselves using a masculine ruled language. Although her main publications were in the 1920's and 30's, her concerns were more appealing to the second wave of feminism as they often discussed the social construction of gender.

From the mid 1990's on emerged the third wave of feminism and it was influenced by post-modern and post-colonial thinking. In this stage many existing notions were challenged such as the concept of complete womanhood, gender, sexuality, body and heteronormativity. In this wave, feminism tends to be global, multi-cultural, and it refuses the false classifications of identity, gender and sexuality. It celebrates diversity such as those of class, ethnicity and sexual preferences and accepts them. Breaking existing boundaries by considering reality not in relation to fixed structures and power relations but in terms of the performance.

### **3. VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE ANDROGYNOUS MIND**

Virginia Woolf saw that the most important aim of the feminist movement was to prepare the way for profound adjustments in the inner lives of the sexes. A union between masculine and feminine principles had to be accomplished as a marriage within the mind

of each individual, and in order to establish the balance between the social roles of both sexes, social adjustments were a necessary beginning.

She claimed that the minds of women differ thoroughly from the minds of men. But the essence of this difference was just beginning to become apparent: the money which women started earning allowed them, for the very first time in history, to live their own lives. Their manners and their ideas had been modified by the continuous pressure of masculine rule. From this moment on, they start to learn values and life styles of their own, without surrendering to male criticism. For the first time they had the chance to actually be themselves.

Many hindrances were falling to them; women were now able to vote, work and build a career. But the real struggle to be completely free had just begun. The last refuge of patriarchal tyranny was in the minds of women themselves, in their attachment to alien ways of thinking that were set by men and that determined how a woman should behave.

Virginia Woolf's purpose, both as a feminist and as a writer, was to contribute to this exploration of feminine values. In order to do that, Showalter observes that "a woman writer must kill the Angel in the house, that phantom of female perfection who stands in the way of freedom." (1989, p.217) This separation from patriarchal idea that a woman should be the angel in the house was also a consideration that Woolf brought to the feminist cause, and it was much more interesting and deeper than the mere advocacy of equal rights. Her real contribution was to reveal the essential quality of female experience in what it differs from that of men.

Considering the profound differences between the sexes, Virginia Woolf points out that:

it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance in any way to speak consciously as a woman. (1929, p.104).

Women would never achieve the state of freeing their minds by reproducing masculine exclusive behavior. They must be aware that both sexes are present in the mind;

they must live so as to give each polarity expression and put them together as a harmonious whole.

Woolf felt a great admiration for the masculine intellect, a reverence that did not prevent animosity towards men's patriarchal behavior. If only one could reunite the masculine, critical side of the mind with the feminine intuitive side, things would be better. Thus, was the issue featured in her books. She called this condition of balance the androgynous mind, i.e. a brilliant and rare mind, in which feminine and masculine principles were unified in perfect harmony. This idea can be explained in a few sentences from her book *A Room of One's Own*,

...whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body...And in the man's brain the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain, the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable estate of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine. (1929,p.98)

Notice that Woolf's description of androgyny suggests a true sexual imagery of intercourse between both the feminine and the masculine polarities in the mind and it worked as the solution for the problem of the feminist who was at war with herself.

As shown above, androgyny is the process in which there is a harmony between the sexes. All cultures and their myths make references to it, uniting the principles of masculinity and femininity in one and only being. This ancient Greek word from *andro* (male) and *gyn* (female) determines a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes are not strongly assigned, it seeks to save the individual from the restrictions of the so called "convenient behavior", which were strongly defended by the Victorians that many still defend nowadays.

According to this orthodox view

"masculine equals forceful, competent, competitive, controlling, vigorous, unsentimental, and occasionally violent" (HEILBRUN,1982,p xiv) whereas "feminine equals tender, genteel, intuitive rather than rational, passive,

unaggressive, readily given to submission. The 'masculine' individual is popularly seen as a maker, the 'feminine' as nourisher." (HEILBRUN, 1982, p. xiv.).

Because we live in a society which is based on heterosexual values, to maintain this norm there must be a strict definition of what it means to be masculine and feminine. Once one is born either a man or a woman one is forced to follow rules appropriate to their gender. About this imposition, Heilbrun declares:

The confident assurance that directing traffic or driving trucks somehow disqualifies women for their "feminine" roles, that the care of young children or the working of crewels disqualifies men for their masculine role, is indicative of the rigidity with which human beings have been divided, not by talent, inclination, or attribute, but by gender. (loc. cit.)

The applicability of the androgynous ideal is quite challenging, it is not easy to break ancient norms that determine the way we must act according to our gender.

#### 4. SPEAKING OF SEX AND GENDER

*Orlando* incorporates essentially all of Virginia Woolf's ideas about the position of women in society, depicting ambiguity of gender in all of its aspects. Orlando experiences all the freedom that men had to explore the world. However, this freedom is immediately taken away from him after the sex change. As a woman, she realizes that the roles left for her gender is in a lower rank than men's, something that becomes clear when she says "*all I can do, once I set foot on English soil, is to pour out tea and ask my lords how they like it. D'you take sugar? D'you take cream?*" (Woolf, 2004, p.58).

Although one's sex is not the drive of how one should act in society, it has long been used as a power distribution factor in terms of gender roles. Commenting on this political use, Showalter states:

gender is not only a question of *difference*, which assumes that the sexes are separated and equal; but of *power*, since in looking at history of gender relations, we find sexual asymmetry, inequality, and male dominance in every known society (1989, p.04)

one should be inclined to act in certain ways according to personal inclinations and desires; yet, sex has been used as a kind of biological determinism to impose the gender one has fit in society and the social roles one has to play.

Woolf's idea of disconnecting sex from gender dialogues with the discussion that the philosopher Judith Butler brings in the third wave of feminism. Butler affirms that there is no necessary connection between one's sex and gender pointing out that the concept of gender was manipulated as a complement to the biological determinism existent in the idea of sex, which entails a view of biology as destiny. According to this view, one would be born either a man or a woman and their different experiences and roles in society would be a natural result of their sexes. This biological determinism works as a means to naturalize the inequality between men and women.

The concept of gender arises to claim that the sexual differences are not decisive in determining the social differences between men and women, but are used and valued by culture, in order to produce and justify differences that are ideologically declared as natural. About this process, Butler declares:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. (1999, p.10)

If we understand gender as a cultural construction which differs from sex, then a body that is born with a female sexual organ it is not a woman yet. This is what Simone de Beauvoir (1970) meant when she said that "one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman". Judith Butler will say that this affirmation seems to suggest that gender is floating and it comes from the place of one's own desire, accommodating a range of choices that originate from the subject, and enabling the possibility of becoming something which has not been given previously. According to the feminist theorist, with her famous sentence Beauvoir (1970) makes us think that this supposed choice implied in "becomes" is always made in the context of a cultural imperative. There is in the subject who is born with a female sexual organ, for instance, a becoming which seems to suggest a choice, but in the context of a compulsory heterosexuality it will be presented to the subject as an imperative, an order: "become a woman!", even though this order is given

in a sort of subtle way. Although there is in the detachment between sex and gender and in this “becomes” a free will which allows the subject, regardless of its sex, to become a man or a woman this choice is made in a culture and in a system of power that places imperatives over the sexes. In this sense, the free will of our own choices, taking into account gender, is in a constant opposition or negotiation with a set of norms which determines how we are supposed to behave, what we must wear and whom we should desire on the basis of our sex. In other words, we have escaped from biological determinism, but not from the cultural and ideological determinism which uses sex as a reference.

Butler also argues that “...there is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings,” (1999,p.12). Considering this argument, we can reflect about how one’s body is involved by discourse since conception. At the very moment one finds out that “it’s a boy!” or “it’s a girl!”, the baby is immediately inserted into the cultural discourse, which takes into account what it means to be a boy or a girl. A whole apparatus of social expectations is mobilized towards whom this subject will desire, how this subject will play and which colors its layette will be. In short, this subject’s body is from the beginning marked by cultural meanings. In this regard, Butler argues that “...sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity.”(1999,p.27), this way sex is gender from the beginning. In this sense, Butler suggests that like gender, sex is also discursively generated. In other words, sex, as well as gender, is not previous to discourse, it is instead, an effect of discourse.

## **5. ORLANDO AND THE FLIGHT TO ANDROGYNY**

Orlando is this extraordinary character, he is a poet, a noble man and he has been living for four hundred years. He takes part into Queen Elizabeth’s court and becomes an ambassador in Constantinople where, at some point, he undergoes a sex change and wakes up as a woman. As we can see nothing is fixed in the novel and the narrator sets this tone at the very beginning when introducing him: “*He-for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it-was in the act of slicing at the head of the Moor which swung from the rafters*”. (WOOLF, 2004p.04)

Notice that in mentioning that Orlando is a man, leading to the assumption that gender will be an issue in the novel. Orlando is engaged in a very masculine activity, portraying the masculine trait of the fighter in a battle field. However, this image is rapidly switched to a description of him presenting feminine features:

The red of the cheeks was covered with peach down; the down on the lips was only a little thicker than the down on the cheeks. The lips themselves were short and slightly drawn back over teeth of an exquisite and almond whiteness. Nothing disturbed the arrowy nose in its short, tense flight; the hair was dark, the ears small, and fitted closely to the head. But, alas, that these catalogues of youthful beauty cannot end without mentioning forehead and eyes. Alas, that people are seldom born devoid of all three; for directly we glance at Orlando standing by the window, we must admit that he had eyes like drenched violets, so large that the water seemed to have brimmed in them and widened them; and a brow like the swelling of a marble dome pressed between the two blank medallions which were his temples. (WOOLF, 2004, p.04-05)

Such description is for the most part related to women because it focuses on elements belonging to women's traits such as softness and the beauty of the features, according to the common view. Woolf starts to give hints of how she disagrees with the accepted binary standards of sex and gender; she induces the reader to her ideal of androgyny.

Orlando is a young wealthy adult in Renaissance England and he becomes a protégé of Queen Elizabeth, she:

named him her Treasurer and Steward; next hung about him chains of office; and bidding him bend his knee, tied round it at the slenderest part the jeweled order of the Garter. Nothing after that was denied him. When she drove in state he rode at her carriage door. She sent him to Scotland on a sad embassy to the unhappy Queen. He was about to sail for the Polish wars when she recalled him. For how could she bear to think of that tender flesh torn and that curly head rolled in the dust? She kept him with her. (WOOLF, 2004, p.08)

He got to enjoy all the freedom that his sex allowed, flirting with the girl he wanted. He got engaged three times with three different aristocratic girls. However, Orlando's heterosexuality is questioned upon his feeling attracted to an androgynous person from the Muscovite Embassy who both skated and dressed like a man,

“A figure, which, whether boy’s or woman’s, for the loose tunic and trousers of the Russian fashion served to disguise the sex, filled him with the highest curiosity. The person, whatever the name or sex, was about middle height, very slenderly fashioned, and dressed entirely in oyster-coloured velvet, trimmed with some unfamiliar greenish-coloured fur. But these details were obscured by the extraordinary seductiveness which issued from the whole person...Orlando was ready to tear his hair with vexation that the person was of his own sex, and thus all embraces were out of the question. But the skater came closer. Legs, hands carriage, were a boy’s, but no boy ever had a mouth like that; no boy had those breasts; no boy had eyes which looked as if they had been fished from the bottom of the sea.”(WOOLF, 2004,p.13)

Luckily for Orlando it was a girl, for he was not ready to get engaged in a homo-erotic affair, this way, escaping from the mandatory heterosexual normativity. Virginia Woolf uses this passage to depict the cultural aspects of building gender, clothes and behavior that for the English people are related to the masculine world, but that in Russia were normal for a girl. Thus, Orlando’s first love appears in the novel. Princess Sasha is described with the androgynous ideal, and she makes Orlando reflect about the limitations and the cultural definition of gender.

In chapter three Orlando’s spectacular sex change happens, and it is guided by an elaborated ritual of liberation. Orlando falls into a sleep which lasts for seven days. Meanwhile, the biographer presents a ritual, hiding the sleeping figure from our view. Suddenly the doors open and three figures enter the room in which Orlando is sleeping:

Our lady of Purity; whose brows are bound with fillets of the whitest lamb’s wool...our lady of Chastity; on whose brow is set like a turret of burning but unwasting fire a diadem of icicles...and our Lady of Modesty...whose face is only shown as the young moon shows when it is thin and sickle shaped and half hidden among clouds. (WOOLF,2004, p.49).

They try to cover Orlando’s naked body despite the trumpets that are calling for their banishment and the emergence of Truth. They sing:

Truth, come not out from your horrid den. Hide deeper, fearful Truth. For you flaunt in the brutal gaze of the sun things that were better unknown and undone; you unveil the shameful; the dark you make clear. Hide! Hide! Hide! (WOOLF,2004,p.50).



Virginia Woolf used these attributes, in order to present the cultural pressures that oppressed contrary opinion of sex and gender. It is through real Truth that a more common disposition of sex and gender can be accomplished in an androgynous form. The three figures (Chastity, Purity and Modesty) are powerless to prevent the revelation, and Truth, with a flourish of trumpets, banishes them, one by one. But before they abandon the field, they join once again and wail:

For there, not here (all speak together joining hands and making gestures of farewell and despair towards the bed where Orlando lies sleeping) dwell in nest and boudoir, office and lawcourt those who love us; those who honor us, virgins and city men; lawyers and doctors; those who prohibit; those who deny; those who reverence without knowing why, those who praise without understanding; the still very numerous ( Heaven be praised) tribe of the respectable; who prefer to see not, desire to know not; love the darkness; those still worship us, and with reason. For we have given them Wealth, Prosperity, Comfort, Ease .To them we go, you leave. Come sisters come! There is no place for us here. (WOOLF,2004,p.50)

The sisters finally leave the room and the door is closed, Orlando wakes. “ He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and... we have no choice left but confess- he was a woman” (WOOLF,2004,p.51) .About the transformation scene, Marder notes that:

Thus the liberation is accomplished. Purity, Chastity, Modesty, who are combined with the repressive forces of “boudoir, office, lawcourt,” with “virgins, city men, lawyers, doctors,” have been exorcised. The truth of androgyny that releases from the bondage of the intellect plays lightly upon scene after scene, turning everything into fantasy. (1968, p.113)

Virginia Woolf shows us Orlando without clothes on. “*Orlando stood stark naked,*” she repeats, “*No human being, since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing*” (2004,p.51).

The radical sex change comes to show a fact that had been established much earlier in the novel: Orlando was androgynous since the beginning, as seen in his description in the first sentences of the book. Now, transformed into a woman, he “*combined in one the strength of a man and a woman’s grace... Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his bath*” (loc. cit.). The change has had to do with externals, not

with essences; his androgynous identity is greatly emphasized with the description of the newly metamorphosed Orlando. The combination of a strikingly masculine trait with a notably feminine trait summarizes the concept of androgyny. Throughout this part of the novel the non-fixed nature of identity is highlighted by the narrator's continually using male pronouns when addressing Orlando, despite the fact that Orlando had been previously announced as a biological female. This premeditated utilization of categorically male pronouns makes very clear that classifications solidly based on a strict binary division are usually incapable of embracing the essence or identity of Orlando.

Further on, Virginia Woolf also concentrates on the false belief that gender and sex are associated:

We may take advantage of this pause in the narrative to make certain statements. Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same. His memory—but in future we must, for convention's sake, say 'her' for 'his,' and 'she' for 'he'—her memory then, went back through all the events of her past life without encountering any obstacle. Some slight haziness there may have been, as if a few dark drops had fallen into the clear pool of memory; certain things had become a little dimmed; but that was all. The change seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely and in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at it. Many people, taking this into account, and holding that such a change of sex is against nature, have been at great pains to prove (1) that Orlando had always been a woman, (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man. Let biologists and psychologists determine. It is enough for us to state the simple fact; Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since. (WOOLF,2004,p.51)

This passage is very important because it clearly shows that Orlando continues completely intact with her identity and gender after having a biological sex change. She remains the same inside, keeping her same world-view, history and identity, everything in this matter is unaltered. Many presumed conventions must be acted now by the female Orlando in order to fit in her gender in society.

Orlando fled Constantinople and sailed back to England, now she will know what it feels like to be a woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and taste the patriarchal tyranny which women were forced to live with. This behavior of male dominance is rapidly noticed on

the ship, she is, as a woman, for the very first time presented to the ambiguity of roles for men and women in society,

At any rate, it was not until she felt the coil of skirts about her legs and the Captain offered, with the greatest politeness, to have an awning spread for her on the deck that she realized, with a start the penalties and the privileges of her position. (WOOLF,2004, p.57).

She starts to examine the ramifications on her life and the role society expects her to play as a woman:

A little of that fat, Ma'am?" he asked. "Let me cut you just the tiniest little slice the size of your finger nail." At those words, a delicious tremor ran through her frame. Birds sang, the torrents rushed. It recalled the feeling of indescribable pleasure with which she had first seen Sasha, hundreds of years ago. Then she had pursued, now she fled. Which is the great ecstasy? No, she thought, this is the most delicious (thanking the Captain but refusing) to refuse, and see him frown. (WOOLF,2004, p.57)

The praise and the immediate restriction under which Victorian women lived started to be experienced by Orlando, now the tables have turned and she notices how male opinions, desires and needs play an important role in women's actions,

She remembers how, as a young man, she has insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely appareled. "Now I shall have to pay in my own person for these desires," she reflected; "for women are not (judging by my own short experience of the sex) obedient, chaste, scented, and exquisitely appareled by nature. They can only attain these graces, without which they may enjoy none of the delights of life, by the most tedious discipline. There's the hairdressing," she thought, "that alone will take an hour of my morning, there's looking in the looking-glass, another hour; there's staying and lacing; there's washing and powdering; there's changing from silk to lace and from lace to paduasoy; there's being chaste year in year out." (WOOLF, 2004,p.58)

It appears several times, in the voice from both the narrator and the character, qualities, actions and roles belonging to each sex, and cultural differences between women and men. After becoming a woman, Orlando feels trapped in the imperatives of compulsory cultural behavior according to biological sex. She realizes that important social roles like politics and business are restricted to men, while women's responsibilities were to take care of the house and children, thus depicting the relation of

power between the sexes. On the other hand, Orlando observes these power relations with shock and irony:

Here she tossed her foot impatiently, and showed an inch or two of calf. A sailor on the mast, who happened to look down at the moment, started so violently that he missed his footing and only saved himself by the skin of his teeth. "If the sight of my ankles means death to an honest fellow who, no doubt, has a wife and family to support, I must, in all humanity, keep them covered," Orlando thought. Yet her legs were among her chiefest beauties. And she fell to thinking what an odd pass we have come to when all of a woman's beauty has to be kept covered lest a sailor may fall from a mast head. (WOOLF, 2004,p.58)

Indeed it is rather ironic that a woman has no social prestige and, at the same, time she owns the power to cause a man to die by simply showing her ankles.

Gender identity is fully expressed by the inquiries and insights from Orlando. As if we could undo the imposed belief that an individual must adapt to pre-established models, which dictate what is masculine and feminine, when these models are actually contextual facts and not "natural" facts as they are imposed by society. About the cultural nature of gender roles, this passage from the novel is very revealing:

The difference between the sexes is, happily, one of great profundity. Clothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath. 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-openness indeed was the soul of her nature-something that happens to most people without being thus plainly expressed. 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 (WOOLF, 2004, p.70)

For Woolf we have both male and female qualities within us. However, the cultural attribute of clothing makes a strict division of what is masculine and feminine, going against the gender of human beings, whose nature is very floating.

As we can see, cultural constructions limit men and women's roles and Orlando had the possibility of escaping from this binary framework of gender. More than that, she has the knowledge of the weakness and virtues from both sexes, as seen in this quote:

For it was this mixture in her of man and woman, one being uppermost and then the other, that often gave her conduct an unexpected turn. The curious of her own sex would argue, for example, if Orlando was a woman, how did she never take more than ten minutes to dress? [...] And then they would say, still, she has none of the formality of a man, or a man's love of power. She is excessively tender-hearted. She could not endure to see a donkey beaten or a kitten drowned. Yet again, they noted, she detested household matters, was up at dawn and out among the fields in summer before the sun had risen. [...] Though bold and active as a man, it was remarked that the sight of another in danger brought on the most womanly palpitations. She would burst into tears on slight provocation.[...] Whether, then, Orlando was most man or woman, it is difficult to say and cannot now be decided.”(WOOLF,2004,p.70)

From the moment Orlando becomes a woman on, she begins to comprehend particularities belonging to both sexes. Therefore, Orlando will oscillate between both genders and that is real androgyny. Virginia Woolf assigns different traits of masculine and feminine behavior in this passage. However, she highlights the androgynous ideal, affirming that it is possible to be achieved.

Now Orlando starts to show how this oscillation of the binary masculine and feminine can be taken a step further other than just acting accordingly to expectations of society concerning one's gender. This realization becomes very clear in this passage:

So then one may sketch her spending her morning in a China robe of ambiguous gender among her books; then receiving a client or two (for she had many scores of suppliants) in the same garment; then she would take a turn in the garden and clip the nut trees-for which knee-breeches were convenient; then she would change into a flowered taffeta which best suited a drive to Richmond and a proposal of marriage from some great nobleman; and so back again to town, where she would don a snuff-coloured gown like a lawyer's and visit the courts to hear how her cases were doing,-for her fortune was wasting hourly and the suits seemed no nearer consummation than they had been a hundred years ago; and so, finally, when night came, she would more often than not become a nobleman complete from head to toe and walk the streets in search of adventure. (WOOLF,2004,p.82)

Notice that in adopting men's clothing Orlando explores other aspects of her identity which still remained intact after the sex change. His cross-dressing allows Woolf to subvert the heteronormativity. Orlando is biologically a woman. However, dressed like a man, she gets to explore the world without gender limitations.

*Orlando* is undoubtedly a reflection about the position of women in society, questioning relevant roles and behaviors, once the eponymous character, who was both a man and a woman, knows the secrets and advantages from both polarities and is able to choose one side, or the other, depending on the occasion and need, this way evoking gender equality.

The interaction of Orlando's multiple selves is best shown in this passage:

“What then? Who then?” she said. “Thirty-six; in a motor-car; a woman. Yes, but a million other things as well. A snob am I? The garter in the hall? The leopards? My ancestors? Proud of them? Yes! Greedy, luxurious, vicious? Am I? (here a new self came in). Don't care a damn if I am. Truthful? I think so. Generous? Oh, but that don't count (here a new self came in). [...] Trees, she said. (Here another self came in.) I love trees (she was passing a clump) growing there a thousand years. And barns (she passed a tumbledown barn at the edge of the road). And sheep dogs (here one came trotting across the road. She carefully avoided it). And the night. But people (here another self came in). People? (She repeated it as a question.) I don't know. Chattering, spiteful, always telling lies. (Here she turned into the High Street of her native town, which was crowded, for it was market day, with farmers, and shepherds, and old women with hens in baskets.) I like peasants. I understand crops.”(WOOLF,2004,p.115)

As we can see, Orlando is constructed in a way to be multiple individuals, he lives several lives, time is playing on her side, and she finds fullness on the way she lives her life.

## 6.CONCLUSION

In developing the present study, it was possible to make an analysis of Virginia Woolf's feminist ideas, especially the ones about the ideal of androgyny. It is expected that new researchers are carry on the discussion of this topic, in order to enrich the academic debate. Yet, we would like to make a few final considerations about it.

Virginia Woolf spoke out freely about the differences between the sexes, expressing her point of view that both the male and the female polarities belong in one's brain and this duality must be explored and not be used as a cause of division generating a war of the sexes. Since the androgynous aspect belongs to all of us, it is necessary to recognize and tap into its potential.

In *Orlando*, as we have seen, Virginia Woolf was able to depict the eponymous character finding this androgynous self, after undergoing a sex change. In doing so, she promoted a deconstruction of the sexual duality, allowing Orlando to establish a relation of cooperation of a compensation of the sexes in the self, thus attaining gender balance and integration, which is very similar to core of Judith Butler's feminist theory, according to which gender is floating and not a feature assigned, once and for all, to individuals after their birth.

## **ABSTRACT**

Androgyny is a recurring theme in the works of Virginia Woolf, it plays an important role in the development of *Orlando: A Biography*'s plot. The purpose of this work is to analyze the strategies which Woolf uses in the novel in order to depict the social relation of gender and express her disbelief on the biological determinism which dictates that gender is connected to sex. This study will try to answer this question: To what extent Orlando's sex change enables him access to his androgynous qualities? Supported by the theories of Judith Butler(1999), Carolyn Heilbrun (1983) and Elaine Showalter (1978,1989).

**KEYWORDS:** Androgyny, sex, gender, feminism, ambiguity



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

BEAUVOIR, Simone de. *O Segundo Sexo*. Tradução Sergio Milliet. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1980.

BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

DASILVA, Tomaz Tadeu (org.); HALL, Stuart; WOODARD, KATHRYN. *Identidade e Diferença*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes Ltda, 2000.

DOREY-Stein, Caroline. *A Brief History: The Three Waves of Feminism*.

<[www.progressivewomensleadership.com/a-brief-history-the-three-waves-of-feminism/](http://www.progressivewomensleadership.com/a-brief-history-the-three-waves-of-feminism/)>

GILBERT, Sandra M; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

HEILBRUN, Carolyn G. . *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*. New York: Norton, 1982.

LEBRETON, David. *Adeus ao Corpo: Antropologia e Sociedade*. Tradução Marina Apenzeller. Campinas: Papirus, 2003.

LEMASSON, Alexandra. *Virginia Woolf: Biografia*. Rio de Janeiro: L&PM, 2011.

MARDER, Herbert. *Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf*. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1968.

METTHEW, Stevens. *Modernism*. New York :Oxford University Press, 2004.

SHOWALTER, Elaine. *A Literature of their Own*. London: Virago, 1978.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Speaking of Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1929.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Orlando: A Biography*. <https://TheVirtualLibrary.org>