DOI: 10.2478/aa-2021-0012

Motifs of homosexuality in Virginia Woolf's Orlando

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Abstract:
To avoid the stigma of societal dissaproval, love for somebody of the same sex has often been hidden from the declinatory views of the public; however, it has also been secretively transcribed into a broad spectrum of art. Virginia Woolf embroidered her homosexuality into the grotesque lines of Orlando. At the time, Woolf was engaged in an intense lesbian relationship with author Vita Sackville-West, who served as a model for the work's main character. Woolf proclaimed her masterpiece "A Biography", mirroring the duality of her own and Vita's character, the perpetual beauty of the book's hero, enduring for centuries, and his subtle gender transition. In the paper, we discuss some of the homosexual motifs in Orlando, which were formed by different influences, including the queer movement, ancient Greek literature and feminism.

Introduction

Even though we live in a rather liberal society nowadays, the tone of Woolf's book Orlando still raises eyebrows on different levels. It is mostly examined due to the transgender approach of the work, which is openly broached by Orlando's change of gender occurring in the book, revealing homosexual motifs at the same time. Algweirien (2017) discusses the fact that Woolf is known mainly as a feminist author, writing about different sensitive issues in her works, directly connected to female emancipation, position and role in society. Freedman (2003) explains that the feminist movement was created as an opposition to patriarchism, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, uniting women and promoting gender equality. However, Beers (2020) agrees that Orlando can be placed into *transfeminist* literature, with multiple points of view on the male and female gender. Koyama states (in Schroth and

Davis, 2021) that the term *transfeminism* is an umbrella term for the liberating views, experiences and forms of feminism put forward by women who were not born in female bodies and cannot find a place among women feminists, but do not belong to the male section of society either. As White explains (2017), *gender identity* does not correlate with *sexual orientation*. Despite a medical transition in gender, attraction towards the same or other sex is not clearly defined. On the one hand, *gender identity* is a societal role, perception of a person and assimilation to a specific gender. While on the other hand, *sexual orientation* is connected to emotional and sexual feelings towards other people (ibid.). In Orlando, gender identity depends on the situational awareness of the main character and the perception of the reader; at the same time; sexual orientation is mostly directed towards the female sex. Gaard (1994, p. 232) deduces "a person may be born a woman (biological sex), appear to be feminine (gender identity), but behave in ways considered masculine (social sex role), describe herself as lesbian (sexual orientation), and have sexual relations with men and women (sexual practice)."

Orlando, with the subtitle "*A Biography"*, was dedicated to Woolf's female lover, Vita Sackville-West, with whom she had a lesbian relationship for more than 10 years (Raitt,1993). The idea to write the story originated due to Sackville-West's inability to inherit her aristocratic family's mansion in Knole, a place where both Vita and Virginia enjoyed spending their time. The reason was simple, Vita was born a woman. According to the National Trust (2020), the original manuscript of Orlando can be found in the house until today. The aim of the paper is a closer explanation and examination of the homosexual motifs in Orlando, from a literary perspective.

Queer literature

Orlando can be read from multiple points of view, but mainly feminist, transgender and homosexual ones that fall under the umbrella term *queer.* According to Whittington (2012), the *queer movement* is widely represented all over the globe, dealing not just with homosexuality itself, but being a cluster of aberrances from the generally perceived borders of the societal mainstream. Queer is an escape for various people with different points of views, from the social majority to the world's edge, without shame, announcing a new type of *homosexual liberation* (ibid.). Norton (2016) states that queer literature and queer history depicts the relationships between queer people, their love and emotional bonds; it is not about the views from outside, but the subjective perspective of people who are in love.

Queer literature has found a stable place in postmodern and contemporary works. According to Spargo (1999, p. 9) "it is not a singular or systematic conceptual or

methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire". Not just with its experimental structure and context, which opposes the traditional way of writing and being innovative in its forms, but mainly with its language, which is very specific, playful, sometimes so fragmented in space and time, as if it has lost any connection with reality, presenting a typical queer element, according to Blackburn, Clark and Nemeth (2015).

The life of Orlando unwinds within three centuries from 1588 until October 1928, the actual year of the book's publishing. Using flashforwards and flashbacks, the author explains the history of the characters, which preceded their sympathy towards the queer. Bakthin's understanding of *chronotope* – the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (in Macovski, 2006, p. 67) – can be applicable to Orlando's analyses, as it connects time and space; depending on the era, the author swaps the points of view and roles of the hero, while taking into consideration his/her current gender. When Orlando's femme fatale Sasha abandons him without explanation, he does not leave his house, containing a symbolical number of bedrooms, 365 as the days of the year and 52 stairways, standing for the weeks. One night he decides to continue writing a thick document, called "Xenophila a Tragedy". DiBattista (2009) explains that the title "Xenophila" is a mispronunciation of the Greek term "xenophobia", derived from the Greek word "xenos", standing for 'queer'. The whole story is interleaved with depictions of Orlando writing a poem which s/he carries with him/her everywhere, keeping it close to his/her heart, named *The Oak Tree.* The poem resembles a tree which grows in the garden of Orlando's father. In the beginning of the story, Orlando lies below it and there she finds herself also in the last lines of the story. Even if the life span of Orlando endures through centuries, the poem serves as a lifeline on his/her life voyage and connects him/her to the present.

The language in queer texts becomes reality itself, using diverse methods, transgressions, digressions or paradigms. According to Goldstein (2003), as queer is revolutionary in its form and style, it has caused the rise of the *homocon* movement (homosexual conservatives), a more conservative section of homosexual society, boycotting the queer movement, which is according to them "too obscene and loud". Furthermore, they criticize queers for defamation of distinguee gays, by presenting sexual intercourse publicly and looking for a safeguard against the disrespectful mainstream (ibid.). Concerning Cadden's observation (in Blackburn, Clark, Nemeth, 2015) queer texts use playful, almost childlike, language with elements of irony, like Orlando, to enlighten the discourse of the challenging

topic for readers, who don’t belong to the queer community. In order to examine the homosexual motives, we need to understand the homosexual discourse.

Homosexuality in context

There are different approaches to homosexual texts; they depend on whether we want to investigate texts from a specific author whom we know to be a homosexual, or explore the homosexual motifs in the text itself. According to the Czech writer Putna (2011), there are different points of recognition, such as sociology or psychoanalyses, concerning Freudian theory. Roetto (2019) and other critics (Meisel, 2012; Bahun, 2012; Barner, 2019), agree that the works and life of the mentally unstable Virginia Woolf were widely influenced by Sigmund Freud, whose translated studies were published by Hogarth Press, a publishing house established by Virginia and Leonard Woolf.

Yingling (1990) states that a homosexual context is created by the language in a chosen literary work; it can explicitly reveal homosexual meaning or hide it between the lines. Brée and Apter (1989) use the term *homotextuality* to describe literary methods that investigate ways of encrypting homosexual motifs and symbols into texts and the possibilities of decoding them, by assorting the texts with reference to gay topics and exploring how the motifs are embedded in the works. Despite the fact that we can find the motif in some works that are meant to be homosexual, it does not necessarily mean that they are homosexual. Putna (2011) agrees that many writers use a certain kind of coding and cannot directly present homosexuality; they use the forms similar to painters, masques and signals. This way they can hide and reveal at the same time. They use masques in the place of a homosexual motif, which is also a signal for the reader that the word, phrase or sentence represents an ambiguity connected to a discussed issue (ibid.).

Kellog (1983) states that *pro-homosexuals* glorify homosexuality, while *anti-homosexuals* deny it. The first group is characterized by the elevation of homosexual issues. We can find lots of allusions in Orlando to influential characters from history whose orientation towards the same sex was well known, and they are widely admired and respected to this day. While a young boy, Orlando is a steward and later a treasurer of Queen Elizabeth I, who is in love with him. The author used the characters from history to add a more realistic feeling to this time-illusioned fantasy. Woolf did not choose the queen by accident. Haggerty (2012) states that Elizabeth I never got married and many rumours surrounded the fact within her lifetime. As far as it is known, she was *a virgin queen* reigning for a long 44 years without having children and her sexuality seems to been a topic for debate (ibid.). Even the state *Virginia* (Virginia History, 2020) in the United States was named after her.

According to Bullough (2020), homosexual affairs were common between the ancient poets and philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, Sappho and others, as well as artists from other

fields and times, such as Michelangelo. Writers occupy places in lists of homosexuals among kings and nobles. It can be both helpful and harmful at once. On the one hand, when readers are looking for homosexual texts, the lists give them a clue where to search. On the other hand, there are some of them who would like to keep their sexual orientation as private information, only for themselves or the immediate people around them. It happens sometimes that on the lists authors have been included who were not homosexuals but spent their time with homosexuals and appeared on the register. As long as new copies have repetitive character of the old ones, they acquired the reputation of being homosexuals, despite the fact they were not. As Boisvert and Goss (2005) assume, it could cause a lot of problems, especially during "a hunt for pederasts" either within the clerical era or World War II, when homosexuals were supposed to be a weak link in the human race, and that was the reason why they were condemned to death. According to Eskens, Helberger, Moeller (2017), personalization deals with homosexual topics, including autobiographical elements from writers' lives. There is not any universal rule determining how much information from one's life a work can contain. Its task is to capture the individuality of each artistic character and writings, whatever the topic and the form are. Humm (2017) explores visual writing in Woolf's works, together with personalization via photography. Orlando, assigned as "A Biography", personalizes the life of Vita Sackville-West, using her real photographs in the book. Woolf with her photographs added realistic features to fantastical elements in the story (ibid.).

Kellog (1983) explains that the anti-homosexual literary texts oppose ideal visions of homosexuals and push them to the edges of society, usually depicted naturalistically as individuals, misanthropes and mentally suffering outcasts who have succumbed to different addictions (smoking, alcohol, drugs). Woolf used the connection to the famous authors of the era, such as Pope, Dryden and Addison, with whom Orlando, in female form, spends time in London. However, she becomes bored again and searches for company within the lowest classes of society, because she finds their stories entertaining. Suddenly London becomes dark and depressing, reminding the reader that the Victorian era has begun. Kellog (1983) claims that homosexual characters are separated and progressively isolated from the rest of the world; they offer a more critical, subjective perspective of society and in most of cases, their lives end tragically.

The authenticity of Orlando is based upon swapping both points of view, elevating the queer and mocking it at the same time. Maybe also that is the main reason why the book was not banned at the time of publishing, despite the conservativism of society, but rather, as Snyder (2019) states, it became a bestseller.

Homosexual motifs in Orlando

In order to search for the homosexual elements in texts, we need to understand the concept of the motif. According to Vogel (2010, p. 5), a motif is "a dominant idea in a literal work, a part of the main theme. Motif may consist of a character, a recurrent image or a verbal pattern. They have a symbolic meaning. But it can also be a concrete image, situation, object or element, which pervade the story". Multiple scholars (Auanger and Rabinowitz, 2002) (Carroll, 2011) (Bullock, 2006) list frequent homoerotic motifs which reoccur in literary texts: *Aestheticism, Arcadia, beauty, birds, Camp (low and high camp), symbolism of colours, Dandyism, Decadence, dualism, Egyptian allusions, Elizabeth I, euphemisms, feminism, flowers, Greek allusions, homosexual environment, the colour mauve, Narcissism, sexuality.*

Cuddon (2013) states that in the 19th century the political, literal and philosophical movement of *aestheticism* was established, derived from the Greek for 'perceptible by the senses'. This demonstration of art's purity became the antithesis to the industrial revolution; depicting pure art, stripped of any realia (Johnson, 2018). Orlando's love appears in different aesthetic forms. Love for nature, art, literature, hedonism, luxury and both sexes equally.

"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" (Woolf, 1995, p. 17). The main character prefers eccentric luxurious clothes, mainly in violet and green. Kress (2002) explains that colours have semiotic representations in the literary context. White, pink, violet, red and green appear repeatedly in homoerotic discourse; these colours were widely worn and beloved by the queer movement, as well as by Dandies (Kularski, n.d.). The expression "oyster-coloured velvet" is not coincidental. According to Williams (1994), oysters were used in Elizabethan times as a female aphrodisiac. Ribeyrol (2017) states that the colour of oyster is similar to *mauve*, which is a shade of violet, popular among homosexuals and *dandies*. Garelick (1999) describes *dandyism* as a literary and artistic movement in the 19th century, whose adherents were characterized by frivolous lifestyles and flamboyant clothes. A dandy pointed at the rest of society, with his own artificial space, standing under the lights in his own play, where he stars in the main role (ibid.).

Woolf's feminism

The novel begins in 1588, which is also known as the Elizabethan era. Queen Elizabeth I appealed to equality between men and women. Elizabethan women were not allowed to attend universities but could be educated at home. According to Doran (2011), the ruler supported the sciences, art and theatre. The queen notices Orlando for the first time when he offers her a bowl of rose water. Mazzeno (1995) assumes that the motif of the rose demonstrates the female gender and can also indicate Orlando's gender. Both Orlando's fusion with nature and her independence from men resemble the character of Virginia Woolf, who enjoyed spending her time in nature (Rosinberg, 2012).

Fauré (2003) claims that the women of the 17th century were still very restricted by their husbands and the male section of society, which they were supposed to obey. According to Gale (2017), the author mocks the rules of society with the depiction of noble Orlando as married to Rosina Pepita, a gypsy dancer of unknown origin. Concerning Baldanza (1955), in reality, Pepita was a part of Vita's close family, her grandmother, a dancer and a concubine. Orlando undergoes a seven-day long trance and wakes up as a woman. Possessing exactly the same intellectual and physiological features as before, she perceives the transition as a natural process:

> "Orlando had become a woman, there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. [...] Many people, taking this into account, and holding that such a change of sex is against nature, have been at great pains to prove (I) that Orlando had always been a woman, (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man. [...] Orlando was a man till the age of thirty; when he became a woman and has remained so ever since." (Woolf, 1995, p. 68)

With a new identity, s/he joins the gypsy tribe in the mountains and watches the beautiful Thessalian Hills, deeply inspired by the freedom of nature. Among the gypsies, s/he lives as a neutral gender, wearing clothes suitable for men or women.

Due to her "new" female gender and marriage that s/he barely remembers, s/he experiences problems with her property back in England, the same issue as Vita Sackville-West faced with her house in Knole (National Trust, 2020). The gypsies mistrust her because Orlando's vision of the world and her interests are odd, oriented towards materialism, which is mostly a male feature, according to McMahon (1993). Moreover, Orlando was a self-sufficient, single woman living on her own, which was impermissible at the time. Woolf shows the pride with which she perceives her new sex: "Praise God that I'm a woman!" (Woolf, 1995, p. 78). She returns to England and flirts with the ship's Captain. There she realizes how powerful a tool the female body is and is undecided as to which sex she prefers more.

The writer wants to stress the sovereignty of her hero, socially and financially. Orlando meets the famous writers of the era, which used to be the privilege of men only. According to Burns (1994), s/he wanders through the centuries, even changing gender, but still cannot find a place in society. S/he had to cope with so many problems as a man and now s/he finally feels free. Due to Sasha, her heart was broken in a male body, but being a female, she feels complete again.

According to Steinfeld (1990), in the Victorian era a woman was expected to find "an appropriate husband". Orlando is at the age of 30, when females were identified more with their looks and beauty, rather than character and intelligence. Orlando is in need of a husband to avoid the unwanted stigma of being an old spinster. She decides to be nature's bride and goes out to the moor. There she twists her ankle and lies down in the grass, ready to pass away. A random sailor accidentally finds and rescues her, and without even knowing the name of her fiancé, they are engaged within minutes. At the end of the book, she gives birth to a child, which means fulfilling her female role according to the rules of Victorian society. Algweirien (2017) states that Woolf as a feminist writer puts on a pedestal the image of women in erstwhile society, who were only educated at home and supposed to get married and raise children to achieve societal recognition. However, Humm (2006) claims that Woolf despite her feminist views and sympathy with the queer movement saw a beauty in maternity and the female role in society.

Greek motifs indicating homosexual context

Woolf's descriptions of Orlando's life and histories are full of sonorous language twists, using the ancient Greek motifs of beauty and carnal love, typical in homosexual literature. Concerning Mondimore's research (1996), Greek allusions are almost always linked to homosexuality. Anders (1999) in consequence of sexual morality, mentions that stories are created with characters from mythology such as Eros, Zeus, Aphrodite and other gods, whose ambiguous sexuality was supported by Hellenic writers. Garry (2005, p. 58) assumes that androgyny was not a rare phenomenon in Greek literature; especially the androgynous divinity of Mother Earth and Father Sky that represented the unity responsible for "all the duality and multiplicity in the universe".

Orlando met the love of his/her life Sasha during the winter of *The Great Frost*, when everything around was frozen and looked like some other mystic land. It can represent an allusion to *Arcadia*, which according to Sharrock (2020) stands for an ancient land in Greece with a rare population and untouched nature, the Greek understanding of paradise. The Oak Tree manuscript, which Orlando is carrying close to his heart, can also be a link to Arcadia. It

is his own metaphorical space, where he can exist despite the circumstances. While writing and reading it, he can live through his love with Sasha and its beauty all over again.

Moreover, the *Bloomsbury Group*, which Virginia Woolf formed with her husband, sister Vanessa and close friends, was according to Detlof and Helt (2016) "Arcadia in London", which united modern artists from different fields, with aesthetic, pacifistic and queer views. Dorothy Parker (in Elkin, p.75) said about the Bloomsbury Group that: "They lived in squares, painted in circles and loved in triangles".

Based on the research of Smith (1991) in many literary texts in 19th-century England, Arcadia defines the homeostasis between humans and nature, explored in wilderness, opposing urbanistic civilization. It served as a sanctuary for the forbidden desires of homosexuals, who found there a safe place, beyond offensive homophobic society. Arcadia became a land where "sinners" don't have to confess their "sins", because animal instincts are part of it (ibid.).

> "What woman would not have kindled to see what Orlando saw then burning in the snow—for all about the looking-glass were snowy lawns, and she was like a fire, a burning bush, the candle and the flames about her head were silver leaves; or again, the glass was green water, and she mermaid, slung with pearls, a siren in a cave, singing so that oarsmen leant from their boats and fell down, down to embrace her; so dark, so bright, so hard, so soft, was she, so astonishingly seductive that it was a thousand pities that there was no one there to put it in plain English and say outright: Damn it, Madam, you are loveliness incarnate…" (Woolf, 1995, p. 91)

Concerning the motif of the mirror, or rather a reflection in the water, Woolf is pointing to the mythological story of Narcissus, who rejected the nymph Echo, for which the goddess of revenge Nemesis punished him. So, Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection, but realizing his love would never be truly fulfilled he committed suicide (Lieber, Bradford, Vethake,1853). At the place by the lake where he was seated bloomed a flower carrying his name, known to today (ibid.). Grabes (2009) explains that the motif of the mirror not only represents vanity, but also the metamorphosis of a personality that experiences societal misconception of homosexual orientation. The inability to grasp love in its purest form, as it is, leads to despair and death. Water, in primary interpretations, is understood as a symbol of cleanliness. However, it also stands for another world existing below the surface. Kalnická (2007) states that the appearance of water in texts is presented as the female element of life, sensuality and perseveration of the circle of life in nature. Neimanis (in Feldman, 2016) describes *hydrofeminism*, examining a female body made of water, creating together a complex unity, connected to each cell in the body, menstruation and lactation, supporting the homosexual motifs in Orlando, where s/he embraces femininity and evokes important epiphanies, such as the bowl of rose water passed

to Queen Elizabeth I when s/he was a young boy, realizing the beauty and power of the female gender when sailing back home to England and flirting with the ship's captain or the instant engagement to the sailor, whose name she had not even known, sirens sitting close to the lakes and the evanescent beauty mirrored on the water. Neimanis (in Feldman, 2016) states that water is also an important part of nature, flowing in rivers, seas and oceans, filling lakes and human bodies with life and creating different mythological interpretations. Goldman (2006) states that as a result of years suffering from severe depression, Virginia Woolf filled up the pockets of her coat with rocks on 28 March 1941 and let the ebb and flow of the river Ouse dissolve her life.

Concerning the explanation of the myth of Narcissus (Lieber, Bradford, Vethake,1853), some biographers ascribe the unfulfilled love to Vita Sackville-West, Woolf's homosexual orientation, its suspicion in society, inability to completely enjoy the beauty that love offers, leading to her despair and death.

Duality in Orlando

Plato (1999) already around the year 375 BC in his symposium, discussed love and homosexuality as a necessity. Describing it as "double man" and "double woman" – a person with two faces that have been separated, and for the rest of their lives they look for their other part. Celis (2015) assumes that besides the similar facial features and initial letters of their names and surnames (Virginia Stephen Woolf; Vita Sackville-West), even Vita's and Virginia's life stories were dual. Suyin (2019) discusses that both of them were writers married to men, but they were searching for fulfilment in romantic relationships with other women; Sackville-West's son Nigel Nicholson proclaimed the book "the longest and most charming love letter in literature" (Nicholson, 1999, p. 218).

The reader encounters Orlando's homosexuality either through the male or female part of his personality. There is a description of his relationship with Queen Elizabeth, who thinks about his "violet eyes and the heart of gold" (Woolf, 1995, p. 10). Violet eyes indicate the homosexuality of Orlando. Orlando was well known for his/her prolific dandy style, wearing both, male and female clothes, standing for androgyny and so did his/her love, Sasha:

> "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. Images, metaphors of the most extreme and extravagant twined and twisted in his mind. He called her a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald, and a fox in the snow all in the space of three seconds; he did not know whether he had heard her, tasted her, seen her, or all three together." (Woolf, 1995, p. 26)

As Celis (2015, p.2) mentions, Orlando was immediately interested in *it*, even though he was not sure whether it is a man or a woman. Clothes are made to distinguish the genders in society; however, Orlando perceived them equally (ibid.). Once Orlando almost has sexual intercourse with a prostitute while s/he is wearing a female outfit "When all was ready, out she came, prepared—but here Orlando could stand it no longer. In the strangest torment of anger, merriment, and pity she flung off all disguise and admitted herself a woman" (Woolf, 1995, p. 107). Here Orlando seems to feel repentance about being a woman; however, she is controlled by her instincts. She would like to seduce the young girl but is afraid of a bad reception and due to it confesses her gender. Moreover, the author indicates the bisexuality of the main character in different situations.

"For the probity of breeches, she exchanged the seductiveness of petticoats and enjoyed the love of both sexes equally." (Woolf, 1995, p. 108) By wearing androgynous clothes, he/she plays both a male and female "role", depending on the situation. The ambiguity of the utterance causes the reader to be unsure about the real gender of the hero throughout the whole story.

Vita Sackville-West was a florist, ten years younger than Woolf and famous for her indulgence of male outfits, which she wore while dating other women (Uis, n.d.). Flowers, according to Haggerty (2000) are one of the most significant homosexual motifs. Floral decorations were widespread in the 18th century and reached the peak of their popularity during the Victorian age. Writers who were searching for ways to express their desires in a euphemistic way used flowers in their fiction. However, at the end of the century they became a homosexual symbol, revealing all the nuances that were meant to stay hidden. Orlando is a young aristocrat and quickly nominated as a treasurer and steward by the Queen, treated with her unusual care until she spots him in her mirror, kissing another girl: "For Orlando's taste was broad, he was no lover of garden flowers only; the wild and the weeds even had always a fascination for him." (Woolf, 1995, p. 12). The author depicts the duality of his character, which inclines towards all the layers of society that offer entertainment, without distinguishing what is suitable for a wo/man of his rank. Cuddon (2013) explains that by the "garden of flowers" the author may be pointing to girls "suitable" for Orlando, belonging to the aristocracy or higher social rank. However, by "the wild" she refers to girls of "unsuitable" social background, such as maids, servants and prostitutes, whereas "the weeds" symbolize "the corruption and decay" (ibid., p. 700) that life on the edge of society brings.

Woolf uses motifs of flowers in many connotations. "Looking down, the red hyacinth, the purple iris wrought her to cry out in ecstasy at the goodness, the beauty of the nature."

(Woolf, 1995, p. 70). The hyacinth is a flower originating in Greece and along with the colour red it's a symbol of lust and homosexual desire, but also of fertility (Pavey, 2011). Purple stands for the androgynous or "universal colour", favoured by homosexuals, as we have mentioned before. Iris, according to Anthon (1871) researching Greek mythology, was the mother of Eros and the goddess who personified the rainbow. The rainbow flag has been adopted by homosexuals all over the world.

The character whose orientation is also debatable is Esquire Marmaduke Bonthorp Shelmerdine, referred to by several names in the story, depending on Orlando's mood (Bonthorp, Mar, Shel). He is the sailor who gets married to Orlando and represents an embodiment of positive character attributes.

> "'Oh! Shel, don't leave me!' [...] 'I'm passionately in love with you. [...] [...]
> 'You're a woman, Shel!' she cried.
> 'You're a man, Orlando!' he cried." (Woolf, p. 124)

It is said that the inspiration for this character was Vita's real husband, who was bisexual, and whom she used to call "Mar". In the book we are not sure about his gender, but some biographers agree that Virginia Woolf used the character to refer to her husband Leonard, who accepted her bisexual orientation.

Conclusion

We carried out research of the homosexual motifs in the work of Virginia Woolf, Orlando. We focused on some of the queer elements in the discourse, supported by the feminist views of the author and her bisexual private life, which was mirrored in the work. There are many other examples in Woolf's works of motifs of homosexuality. We have itemized the very frequent homosexual motifs in *Orlando*, which can be widely applied to other literary texts as well. The whole context depends on the percipient's intuition and imagination by which they put the finishing touches to the context and overall understanding. The given homosexual motifs represent a compass for readers, showing them the direction of what to search for, in order to execute analyses in this and other texts dealing with similar topics.

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