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Concours / Examen : Baccalauréat Section / Spécialité / Série : Britannique

Epreuve : Langue et littérature Matière :

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against racism. The notion of time becomes, through writing, a tool for the community to rely on past and plan for the future.

As a conclusion, Jackie May explores the notion of time through writing and by using it as a distance with the past in order to deal with its unloppable passing and to immortalise it, as well as to have a general outlook on both past and future.

Orlando, Virginia Woolf

2. 'For all its playfulness, Orlando is a very serious book'. To what extent do you agree?

Described by Virginia Woolf as a "writer's holiday", Orlando is expected to be a novel of pure pleasure, both for the writer and reader, whereas "seriousness" would imply heavier concerns, opposed to levity and comedy, backed by real or more complex reflections. Although Orlando is in many ways a comedy, it addresses heavier concerns both through its critical and historical dimension.

In many ways, Orlando can be considered as a comic

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novel. As a satire of a biography, it expects pleasure both for the writer and reader. Indeed, the writer plays with biographical conventions, such as the subtitle "a biography", the presence of pictures or the voice of the biographer. But she deviates from it, for instance with the second picture, representing Yasha: it is anachronistical because it's a photograph of a supposed Renaissance person. This clash between the expected biography and the actual fiction is a source for amusement. Moreover, the narration is very fantastical, creating a fun writing experience and unusual reading one. For instance, in chapter 3, during Orlando's change of sex, the narration completely changes. It is closer to drama, with many direct dialogues and stage directions: "Purity says this". It is also very fantastical as Orlando's sex is changed by three witches. Moreover, it is actually the recreation of a cloaque, Jacobean allegorical drama. By playing with different genres and very fantastical telling, Woolf also creates comedy for the reader. Overall, recurrent comic patterns or events invite the reader to laugh of what he is reading. For instance, in the beginning of chapter 2, the biographer accumulates questions about life and death, but abruptly ends the reflection by saying that after half an hour, and with no answer, he abandoned his thinking. This accumulation of tension cut by the final punchline brings humor to the book. Orlando is then a playful and comic experience, both for the writer and reader, in many ways.

However, this comedy hides a true social criticism of conventions, giving it more seriousness. On the one hand, it is

a long criticism on gender conventions, where Woolf denounces the inequalities between women and men, the social roles assigned to them and the lack of flexibility of the norms. For instance, when Orlando comes back to London in the boat in chapter 9, there is a general comment on the social conditions of women. She denounces the clothes, which were very restrictive at that time and prevented women from moving a lot. She also denounces the male gaze on women, who are objectified: they are reduced to ship names, such as "The Enamoured Lady", conducted by men, and their bodies are dangerous objects for men's sexual attraction, such as Orlando's ankles, who nearly killed a man looking at them. On the other hand, Orlando is a criticism of writing conventions, especially biographical ones. Indeed, the incipit presents Orlando playing at war and slicing heads, while his father is at war. He has a long history of victorious male ancestors. Furthermore, the biographer is introduced with a male pronoun as soon as the book starts, we are therefore introduced to an overly male history, told by men, about men. It is moreover told by the winners only, and trivialised or euphemised as war becomes a game. Here, Woolf criticises therefore this way of narrating history. However, Woolf's denunciation of social norms and conventions is integrated in the story and thus kept with a light tone. Orlando is never completely comic or completely criticised but offers both at the same time, as a satire implies. It is through playfulness that Woolf can criticise society.

Finally, although Orlando is a false biography, it constitutes a real and detailed historical view through the centuries. On the one hand, Orlando is a novel about the history of literature. Indeed, Woolf's writing tools evolve as the centuries pass, to be adapted each time to the writing style of the time period. For instance, in chapter 2, Woolf uses Jacobean tools to fit with the period Orlando lives in. Orlando's moments in the crypt and the skulls he finds there, his

reflections on death and on the vanity of life as well as the biographer's concerns on one's own's finitude are typical Jacobean motifs. But it is also through intertextuality that Woolf reconstitutes the history of literature. For instance, in chapter 1 during the dinner with Pasha, Orlando composes a sonnet in which he says "He saw the flower of danger". It is a reference to Shakespeare's "Out of this nettle, danger! We pluck this flower, safety" in Henry IV and is time-appropriate as Shakespeare was an Elizabethan playwright. On the other hand, it is the history of England that Woolf tells. For instance, in chapter 1, the telling of the Great Frost refers to a real event which happened at that time in England. Woolf presents a detailed evolution of England's lifestyle and events throughout the chapters. However, once again, it is with levity that the writer relates to this event. For instance with the Great Frost, the accumulation of details or the fantastical telling of a woman bloom to dust prevent it from being reliable history. In the same way, the presence of intertextuality was a way for Woolf to play with literary history. Therefore, Woolf relates a detailed history implying serious work which becomes both a source for historical prosperity and amusement.

As a conclusion, Orlando is at first sight a comedy but actually reveals itself to have both a critical and historical dimension behind. It is therefore a constant mingling of playfulness and seriousness more than isolating these two notions.