

# “By some Dexterous Deference to The Spirit of the Age”: Woolf’s Staging of *Othello* Beheld Through Early Twentieth Century Racial Anxieties

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## Abstract

*Orlando*, Virginia Woolf’s 1928 novel, has been skillfully analysed for a century, with a great focus on its gender representations and fantastical historical narrative. We have chosen to centre our research on a particular moment before the protagonist’s self-imposed exile and gender change, in which he and his lover, Sasha, escape the court’s trappings and wander into a performance of *Othello*. We argue that the choice of the play is relevant in multiple ways. Firstly, it showcases Woolf’s dedication to referencing the literary canon and illustrating the protagonist’s immature relationship with literature. Secondly, it is important because it specifically engages with nineteenth century literary criticism, Shakespearean criticism and performance, and its connections with white supremacy. Finally, it is pertinent due to the centrality of public discourse around interracial relationships in the early twentieth century, and how the character of Othello signifies a danger to British decency and the maintenance of heteropatriarchal relationship norms.

**Keywords:** *Orlando*; *Othello*; Interracial relationships; Literary canon; White supremacy

## Resumo

*Orlando*, o romance de Virginia Woolf de 1928, tem sido analisado a dedo ao longo de um século, com um grande foco nas suas representações de género e na sua narrativa histórica fantástica. Escolhemos centrar a nossa pesquisa num momento particular, antes do exílio autoimposto pelo protagonista e da sua mudança de género, no qual ele e a sua amante, Sasha, escapam dos confinamentos da corte e deparam-se com uma encenação de *Othello*.

Argumentamos que a escolha desta peça é relevante por vários motivos. Primeiramente, demonstra a dedicação de Woolf a referenciar o cânone literário e a ilustrar a relação imatura do protagonista com a literatura. Em segundo lugar, é importante por especificamente interagir com crítica literária do século dezanove, com crítica shakespeariana e com performance teatral e as suas ligações com a supremacia branca. Finalmente, é pertinente dada a centralidade do debate público sobre relações interraciais no início do século vinte, e na medida em que a personagem Othello simboliza um perigo para a decência britânica e para a manutenção de normas de relações heteropatriarcais.

**Palavras-chave:** *Orlando*; *Othello*; Relações interraciais; Cânone literário; Supremacia branca

## Introduction

Woolf's *Orlando* spins discourse that overflows with political richness. The novel combs through nearly four centuries of history, dissecting the patriarchal pillars of British history and critiquing the assumptions of its literary dialectical companion as experienced by the titular character. It "reflects upon women writers' relationship with the canon", as Jane De Gay puts it on her chapter "Rewriting Literary History in *Orlando*" (158), especially via the protagonist's literary ambitions.

We argue that besides this skilful inspection through a feminist and sapphic perspective, Virginia Woolf's ironizing gaze scavenges the literary canon and stages *Othello* in contemplation of the contemporary circumstances of British life, further orchestrating it to comment on the amateurish stage of Orlando's artistic aspirations. The latter's hold on the performance he witnesses is framed by his aristocratic lifestyle and heritage. Furthermore, we analyse the deliberate descriptive choice of Orlando's identifying the actor as a "black man", an otherwise anachronistic remark given the history of Shakespearean performance, which will be briefly documented.

In short, this paper will argue that Virginia Woolf promptly rejects nineteenth century Shakespearean criticism, most importantly through the portrayal of young Orlando's flawed understanding of Shakespeare, which follows this tradition of ideals - one that sees blackness and barbarity as one and the same. First, we take a closer look at the centrality of literary criticism for the crafting of *Orlando*. Then, we focus on the storytelling aspect of *Othello* and on its potential to create real world narratives around black men, which is why it is such a pivotal component of Woolf's novel. To finish, we address the performance history of the play, as well as written judgements about black men in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to argue that Woolf deliberately casts aside the light-skin concepts of the Bronze Age of *Othello* to bridge her contemporary discourse around interracial relationships and Orlando's experience.

## Literary Tradition and the Artistic Experience in *Orlando*

As Michael Bell argues in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, his seminal 1919 essay, T.S. Eliot emphasized that tradition “was not what he called an ‘orthodoxy,’ a rule to be followed, but a largely unconscious inheritance being continually modified within the self” (Bell 16). In *Orlando*, Woolf revitalizes the genre of life writing, in a biography that eludes traditional methods and strategies. The novel focuses on the emotional experience of the protagonist’s life, a turn inwards that made her writing singular. Michael Bell explains that, in this period, “historicism was undermined by the questioning of the scientific model, for the word history refers both to the unimaginably vast process of events making up collective human life and to the interpretative discipline through which it is understood” (14).

Similarly, this is the biographer’s great endeavour as well: to be subject to the mercy of time and its lost documents, as well as the impenetrability of the human mind. Woolf’s deconstruction of this fashion of documentation is the backbone of the novel, reveling on the subjectivity of time and epochs. However, there is more to be said regarding the renewal of literary pillars. As such, Shakespeare’s influence comes to light throughout the text. His major indirect appearance coincides with Orlando and Sasha’s love affair, and the performance of *Othello* witnessed by them enriches the entire work in its multiple layers of importance.

The entanglement with “Sasha” follows the protagonist’s giving up on consorting with pirates and other “low born company” of their liking (Woolf, *Orlando* 19). Over his fascination with the parrots and tavern women, comparable in their strangeness, Orlando “appeared once more at the Court of King James” (21). This vacillation between institutional belonging and self-exile, whilst varying in gravity, is a recurring one in the novel, sometimes even working dialectically, in tandem - such as later, when faced with an “uninhabitable” mansion, he bids King Charles to “send him as Ambassador Extraordinary to Constantinople” (71). This tension is present not only in the course of Orlando’s life, but also in the designing of the novel itself, particularly in relation to literary tradition. Whereas Woolf acknowledges Shakespeare’s inevitable influence on her work and directly references him, she rejects how her ancestors treated his work.

Naturally, Virginia Woolf’s concern with spotlighting storytelling is reflected on her choice of Shakespearean play to stage. *Othello* expands on the art of story crafting, of the ambivalence of points-of-view and the fundamental aspect of subjectivity in one’s experience of a narrative (Thompson 2). It is the persuasive

nature of art and theatre, in addition to the gravity of every detail of a story's framing that is in question here. In her introduction to the revised Third Arden Series edition of the play, Ayanna Thompson highlights that "Othello dies worrying about the way his life will be framed" (2). In *Orlando*, his actions are used to inflame the young man's blind and jealous tantrum, shaping a great commentary of how patriarchal violence relies on actors, like the soldiers in Woolf's essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid", where she explains that disarmament alone won't quench men's thirst for violence, which is fostered by their nurtured love for it, perpetuating the cycle of brutality (218).

To exemplify the importance of personal narratives and perceived similarity to justify violence, the central relationships of the works can be analysed. Sasha is charmed by Orlando's accompanying mockery of the ridiculous British court, which labels him as a kind of outsider as well, just as Desdemona falls in love with Othello based on his unique experiences ("She loved me for the dangers I had passed" (Shakespeare 1.3.168), Othello remarks, remembering the story of their courtship in the context of his retelling his life's tragedies and adventures).

This is, at best, a superficial parallel of their circumstances, that Orlando amateurly latches onto to project himself onto Othello. He is not living a great love, nor will he suffer a great loss - but Shakespeare's words move him, and his imitation of what he witnesses, instead of taking the form of literary inspiration, as Eliot recommends, is personal, and therefore ridiculous. Eliot himself comments that "influence can fecundate, whereas imitation, especially unconscious imitation - can only sterilize" (Eliot 18). Even if we choose to interpret *Othello* not as a racial tragedy, but a military one, in order to highlight a construction of domineering patriarchy, their military experiences are not even close to the same.

Thus, whereas Orlando's impactful emulation of the tragedy does, indeed, sterilize his artistic progress, how does Woolf's clever reference influence the reader? What does it evoke?

Woolf does rescue a primary medieval theatre motif, that of the Vice. In her analysis of the play's genre, Ayanna Thompson relates *Othello* to the medieval morality play, calling attention to the Vice, "frequently depicted as a worldly figure . . . dressing as an Egyptian or a Turk with the aid of . . . makeup" (Thompson 8). Shakespeare was aware of this prototype, most famously with Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*. She further explains that, at the climax, Iago is identified as this figure, and "Othello seems to interpret the events through the lens of a morality play" (Thompson 8).

As Thompson explains, Shakespeare was inspired by the life of Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan (15) and, theatrically speaking, *The Battle of Alcazar* “set the stage for Shakespeare’s depictions of race, rhetoric and intercultural collisions” (18), insomuch as “Iago embodies the devilish improvisational and rhetorical effectiveness of Muly Mahamet and Aaron, the Moor, while Othello embodies the blackness of them” (20). The villainy of these figures would be undoubtedly present in the Elizabethan mind. There is a literary chain that enables these narratives, and, whether one believes Shakespeare to be countering them through the complexity of Iago and Othello’s characterisations or not, Woolf explores this web of thought.

As such, Shakespeare’s novelty within the genre is enticing the audience to identify the worldly figure - Othello - as vice and then subverting their expectations, given that Iago is the true corruptor. Orlando, however, upon viewing the performance, misses this disruption. His amateurish analysis causes him to effectively suffer, as if he himself were an actor in the play, influenced by Othello, his Vice figure.

This affectation comes to a height, in this chapter, with the violence that he is seemingly infected by upon viewing the performance. At the same time, the violence stirred has racial undertones: a raging irrational black man, “vociferating” (Woolf 35), is a complex stereotype present in Modernity; Sasha and Orlando work almost as foils of Othello and Desdemona, in the sense that Sasha was glimpsed with someone else whilst Desdemona’s so-called innocence is a topic of discussion, and in that Orlando visualizes killing Sasha projected onto the action on stage. The “frenzy of the Moor” (Woolf 35) infects his otherwise passive disbelief in her infidelity. Orlando is betrayed, just as by the fox of his childhood, which was decapitated by his father - a curious parallel to the decapitated head of the Moor that opens the novel, alluding to the bloody inheritance of English patriarchy (Daileader 60).

### **Othello’s racial ambiguity and Woolf’s repudiation of nineteenth century criticism**

Woolf had to “grapple with Victorian ideas and conceptualizations”, John Ruskin particularly, which we will now further analyse. As such, the Great Frost as portrayed in the work derides his view of the Renaissance as a blight which ruined medieval morality: whilst the “decadence of the courtiers who celebrate even while countryfolk lose their livelihoods” is criticized, there is an admiration of nature in its sparkling devastation and cyclical renewal, and it commences a period of shy inquiries into personal and political freedoms (De Gay 143). Orlando is awakened to his sexuality

but, we argue, most importantly not divorced of medieval constructions, either literary or prejudicial.

In the line of political and personal freedoms, the actor being perceived as a black man by Orlando is not an innocent anachronism (Daileader 62), as it is believed that Richard Burbage portrayed the moor in blackface and with the aid of prosthetics - just as Aaron, another moor, is presented in a drawing by Henry Peacham, dated 1595, in the Longleat manuscript, where one can tell that there is a figure with dark skin and coily hair meant to be Aaron from *Titus Andronicus*. Prosthetics, therefore, conveyed race in these stagings (Thompson 28). In our point-of-view, it is a necessary element for the aristocratic youth to project an image of inherent violence to a body deemed barbaric.

We argue this because, interestingly, it is not consensual that Othello was meant to be read or seen as a black man, specifically in a sixteenth century context. Ania Loomba explains that scholars have pointed out that “it may be particularly anachronistic to speak of racial difference in that period because whereas today the term ‘race’ carries overwhelming connotations of skin colour, in early modern Europe the bitterest conflicts between European Christians and others had to do with religion” (Loomba 2). She further argues, however, that there is relevance in “tracing [ideologies of race’s] histories”, adding that literary texts are fundamental to this study, because they not only “reflect and shape their immediate present, but also encode ideas from the past” (Loomba 2).

Admittedly, coming back to Shakespeare, the concept of Empire was present in the Jacobean court, as a way of cultivating a national identity. In 1607, Edward Topsell’s descriptions of human beings resonate with what we now deem racist rhetoric, “laying the basis of a comparison between apes and black people” (Loomba 27). What’s more, Thomas Herbert described Africans as “Devilish savages” or “Devils incarnate”, which should remind us of much of both *Titus Andronicus* and *Othello*’s texts (Loomba 27) and of medieval theology’s influence on the portrayal of blackness.

However, it would be specifically furthered and weaponised against other peoples in the nineteenth century, just as the question around Othello’s race became central to literary and performance criticisms. A great example of this narrative is Thomas Carlyle’s headstrong belief in the value of his country’s Anglo-Saxon heritage. As Farah Karim-Cooper puts it:

Emerson’s lesser-known book *English Traits* helps us understand why Shakespeare was of particular importance in the context of this Anglo-Saxon inheritance. It praises the whiteness and stature of English men, particularly the face and its “fair complexion,

blue eyes, and open and florid aspect”. Emerson aligned these features with a love “of truth . . . fine perception, and poetic construction. The fair Saxon man, with open front, and honest meaning . . . is not the wood out of which cannibal, or inquisitor, or assassin is made, but he is moulded for law, lawful trade, civility, marriage, the nurture of children, for colleges, churches, charities, and colonies”. (41)

Indeed, alarm surrounding the claim of an Anglo-Saxon heritage stems precisely from “its elevation as a racial differentiator in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Karim-Cooper 40). The author further references Matthew Gabriele and Mary Rambaran-Olm’s work, concerning current claims to this heritage that recover the myth of British nativity, thus fueling racist rhetoric (Karim-Cooper 40). The legacy exploitation of the figure of William Shakespeare in this context is vast, and this is where Orlando’s heritage comes in.

As such, despite Woolf’s original plan to portray an unattractive, lonely, poor woman (De Gay 135), Vita’s life is the thread woven through the novel. Orlando’s struggle to reclaim his inheritance and home is hers, just as “The Oak Tree” is modelled after “The Land”. As such, her material conditions and standing are critical for the character’s struggles and prejudices. The legacy of violence represented by the decapitated head in the beginning, at an extreme contrast with Queen Elizabeth’s mourning the possibility of Orlando’s “tender flesh torn” and “curly head rolled in the dust” (Woolf, *Orlando* 17), is the curse of an ancient lineage - in his introduction to the novel, Michael H. Whitworth reminds us that Herbrand de Sackville had come with William the Conqueror to England in 1066 (xiii), braiding legacy and carnage.

Historically speaking, otherness has been central to English Literature “generated by the Crusades and by the encounters between Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe” (Loomba 4), which Orlando’s familial roots entangle with. The sheer concept of “*sangre azul*” was historically claimed by Spanish aristocracy “who declared they had never been contaminated by Moorish or Jewish blood, and hence had fair skins through which their blue blood could be seen” (Loomba 7).

### **The Dangers of Promiscuity and White British Ruin**

In her essay “Kissing a Negress in the Dark: Englishness as a Masquerade in Woolf’s *Orlando*”, Jaime Hoovey mentions that English nationality is always framed by a racial claim and underlines the relentless link between heterosexual respectability and gender. Considering the moral panics of the 20s and ultimately the 1928 trial of Radclyffe Hall, Woolf’s novel is “a product of public anxieties and historical debates about race and nation” (394), and so is her staging of Othello. Desdemona disobeys

both the Senate and the patriarchal authority of her family, all in favour of her husband. This speaks to early twentieth century anxieties around interracial relationships and their alleged predatorial nature.

Similarly, Loomba comments that both black people “and Muslims were regarded as given to unnatural sexual and domestic practices, as highly emotional and even irrational, and prone to anger and jealousy; above all, both existed outside the Christian fold” (91), and concludes that this is evidence of the intersection of medieval and newer conceptions around these ethnic groups in early Modern England (92). For Woolf’s purpose, it is irrelevant whether Othello was meant to be a black man or not, in the original stagings, because she chooses that he be perceived as one, as far as Orlando is able to articulate what he sees, and not necessarily what was staged at that point in time, because it is pertinent to her contemporaries’ political climate, mainly in regard to black men’s perceived promiscuity and dread around the possible collapse of white heterosexual propriety.

In her essay “Othello’s Sister: Racial Hermaphroditism and Appropriation in Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*”, Celia R. Daileader concludes that, closing the first chapter, “two Shakespearean, fugitive, interracial couples get superimposed upon Orlando and the Russian princess on the eve of their planned flight” (62): in addition to Othello and Desdemona, Jessica and Lorenzo, from *The Merchant of Venice*, are visible. This further highlights the necessity of a chasm between the lovers, ethnic and cultural, to introduce criticism to societal norms that bind Orlando to colonial patriarchy.

As such, this chasm is glaringly evident in Orlando. After the initial confusion regarding Sasha’s sex triggered by her Eastern garment introduces the theme of androgyny and ambiguous sexuality, Orlando is changed “from a sulky stripling . . . to a nobleman”, charmed by her sharp remarks on the court bumpkins, aching for “another landscape, and another tongue”; because Sasha is completely unlike the previous women he liked, he struggles to find apt comparisons, landing in a fox, an olive tree (Woolf, *Orlando* 29); beforehand choosing “a melon, a pineapple” (Woolf, *Orlando* 24), multiple consumable foreign elements.

Furthermore, even though a reference to, for instance, *Much Ado About Nothing* would better fit the evocation of jealousy, given that Hero is thought to be caught in the act of infidelity, the choice of staging *Othello* can only be due to the conscious effort to highlight the cultural chasms between the lovers and to trigger her contemporaries’ sensibilities around black men.



As a woman living in the early twentieth century, Virginia Woolf inherits a legacy of scholarship that focused on trying to prove the inferiority of other races, including the efforts of Herbert Spencer for instance:

On turning from these deductions to examine the facts, with a view to induction, we meet difficulties like those which we met in the last chapter. As in size and structure the inferior races differ from one another enough to produce some indefiniteness in our conception of the primitive man—physical; so in their passions and sentiments the inferior races present contrasts sufficiently marked to obscure the essential traits of the primitive man—emotional. . . . Recapitulating the emotional traits . . . we have first to note the impulsiveness which, pervading the conduct of primitive men, so greatly impedes co-operation. That “wavering and inconstant disposition”, which commonly makes it “impossible to put any dependence on their promises”, negatives that mutual trust required for social progress. Governed as he is by despotic emotions that successively depose one another, instead of by a council of the emotions shared in by all, the primitive man has an explosive, chaotic, incalculable behaviour, which makes combined action very difficult. (Spencer 56-71)

Any educated reader of Woolf’s will have been familiar with these theses. Just as in Shakespeare’s time, “as English contact with sub-Saharan African increased and the slave trade proliferated, the associations of blackness and depravity became more widespread and intense” (Loomba 36), in Woolf’s lifetime there was serious public unrest around this topic as well. Jaime Hovey links British newspaper writings which associate colonial immigrants and sexually emancipated white women in a single suspicion (394).

Indeed, in the 1920s, Britain was rocked by multiple race riots. British men were concerned with white women’s fidelity to race, and therefore nation, Hovey explains, a preoccupation “evident in newspaper accounts of the 1919 race riots, which were started by angry mobs of white men who suspected African, West Indian and Arab immigrants of taking their jobs and of consorting with white women” (Hovey 394). This is a concern that dates to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century where, despite there being very few actors of colour on stage in Great Britain, there are those whose only archival evidence of existence is a criminal record. Furthermore, the deliberate mention of the accused’s race serves precisely to feed the narrative of danger:

In Blackburn in 1895, “Two members of the ‘Old Kentucky’ company, performing at the theatre, named William Henry Shearwood and John Albert Wilson, both coloured men” were charged with “malicious wounding” after defending themselves from an

attack by a bystander who had seen them speaking with two (presumably white) girls. More troubling still are the multiple legal cases where actors of color stood accused of kidnapping presumably white, young English women. In 1901, for instance, “Eldridge Adolphus Patterson, a man of colour, described as an actor, was charged with the abduction of two Halifax mill girls.” A decade earlier, “James Travis, a coloured man belonging to the Uncle Tom’s Cabin Company, at present playing at the Doncaster Theatre, was brought up charged with having abducted Mary Havern, a girl of the age of 15 years, from the custody of her parents, with intent to have carnal knowledge of her.” Travis and Havern, the report alleged, “lived together as man and wife” for several days before Travis was arrested. In a similar case in 1893 “Louis Rock, a coloured man” stood accused of “acting illegally towards Jane Ellen Price, 14 years old”; according to the account, and as in the case of Travis and Havern, Price had been passed off as Rock’s wife”. (Chakravarty 197-8)

Necessary to this conception of black men’s depravity is, in contrast, white women’s purity and complacency with the British Empire. The length of Orlando’s life considered, being politically challenged only when presenting as a woman is a testament to a privilege of standing that Woolf is well aware of, just as she is aware of her prejudices, portrayed in self-satire. One example of that is in *A Room of One’s Own* when, attempting to reject the possessive tendencies of colonizing English men, she denies a “negress” her womanhood whilst categorizing her as “fine”, which objectifies her simultaneously (Carr 210).

Similarly, a perception of the Other as an object for sexual fantasy and escapism is fundamental to Orientalism, as Said himself puts it when analysing Flaubert’s writing:

Woven through all of Flaubert’s Oriental experiences, exciting or disappointing, is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex. . . . Why the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies, is something on which one could speculate. (Said 188)

This facet of Woolf’s complicity as inherent to her white womanhood is particularly interesting as finishing touch to our point. In her essay dedicated to Joseph Conrad, she praises his writing style and, in relation to the quality of his characters, says “They were in conflict with Nature, but at peace with man. Nature was their antagonist; she it was who drew forth honour, magnanimity, loyalty, the

qualities proper to man; she who in sheltered bays reared to womanhood beautiful girls unfathomable and austere” (*The Common Reader* 209-210).

However, is not nature, specifically in *Heart of Darkness*, the wilderness and the untamable, a metaphor for black people, putting them at the antipodes of civilization? Chinua Achebe explains, in his critique of Conrad, that “the Thames too (...) conquered its darkness, of course, and is now in daylight and at peace. But if it were to visit its primordial relative, the Congo, it would run the terrible risk of hearing grotesque echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings” (Achebe 252).

Not only is this imagery present in *Orlando*, but most prevalently as a threat, much as it was framed in the early twentieth century. Woolf evokes racist concerns around relationships between black men and white women specifically, in order to better fuel the reader’s belief in the power of Othello’s influence over Orlando, allied with subtle metanarrative comments on literary tradition and her toying with the latter. It is in this framing of Orlando as naive that her critique of nineteenth-century criticism falls: the stubborn denial of Othello’s blackness in what is known as the “bronze age” of portrayals of the Moor, when, as Ayanna Thompson points out, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in 1818, “bluntly states that a good ‘Venetian girl’ could never love a ‘veritable negro’. Despite the fact that Coleridge attempts to cloak his argument in historicist terms, his arguments against Othello’s blackness are a clear reflection of his own time, the early nineteenth century when the transatlantic slave trade was fully established and anti-miscegenation laws were enacted” (Thompson 31). This logic gained traction and, in her own way, Woolf rescues Othello from this influence, even if to provoke her readers.

## Conclusion

To finish, discourse around the appropriate framing of Shakespeare’s tragedies and their enduring themes still spills ink to this day. The actor Adrien Lester reflected on his experience regarding the play:

The culture of the time we can research, but Shakespeare’s intentions are much harder to pin down. So we must draw our own conclusions. . . . I don’t particularly like the play. If it is done very well and I have to watch it, I find it deeply upsetting and I come away angry. If on the other hand, it is done really badly then I come away angry for all sorts of different reasons. (224)

From a reception studies perspective, these comments raise curious pleas. Our question is another, however, and one which Woolf perhaps inadvertently raises with her staging of the play in *Orlando*: to whom is *Othello* staged across the ages? Which provocations does current discourse offer to a professor in a seminar, or a reader on his/her sofa? Shakespeare's original audience might recall the symbolic contrast of the black/white binomial, which would be made even more explicit in works such as *The Masque of Blackness*, confronting the audience with blackness as a taint that cannot be washed away. A Victorian audience will, on stage, have its contemporary eugenics discourse in the great stage of British imperialism staring back, and see black animality in our protagonist. Whilst it is paramount to discuss the context of the composition of the play, it is equally preponderant to evaluate the evolution of those constructions, how they influenced and were influenced by history and how they impact our experience of the work. What do we see?

Woolf was aware of the racial discourse of her time, specifically around interracial relationships, and this is visible via her constructions aimed at her particular audience, the readers of the novel *Orlando*. In short, she handpicks the Shakespearean tragedy that will both illustrate Orlando's literary greenness and allow for a lively dialogue with current events, as well as with the criticism her generation inherited.

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