

University of Salzburg  
Department of English

**Project: Body Transformations in British Fantastic Literature** (Sabine Coelsch-Foisner)

14 Oct. 2004, HS 350 11.00 – 12.30

Guest Lecture:

**“(T)extasy: Bodily and Textual Transformations  
in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*”  
Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou  
(University of Thessaloniki)**

**Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou**

Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou is Assistant Professor of English Literature at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. She holds an MA in Drama and Theatre Studies from Leeds University, England, and a Ph.D. from Aristotle University. Her book *Feminist Readings of the Body in Virginia Woolf's Novels* was published in Thessaloniki in 1997. She has been teaching and publishing in the areas of modernism, realism, as well as on feminist and body theory.

**“(T)extasy: Bodily and Textual Transformations in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*”**

The inexpressibility of the female body and the parallel improbability of a female text in Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando* lead to a transference of body to text. If one assumes that *Orlando* has always been a woman, her unquenched desire for her poem would then be a quest for a female text, a female language that could express female desire. Body and text are interdependent, and interchangeable, and following the pattern which Cixous set some fifty years after the writing of the novel, both generate each other. Being written by an androgynous biographer, *Orlando*'s body and text undergo a process of censoring and editing, which, nevertheless, renders them voiced, utterable. The male presence, the male voice is there to foster the female in its first steps of expression. Puzzled and shocked by the outcome, the biographer can finally do no more than accept this strange, veiled presence. What the reader is confronted with in the end is a text with all the symptoms of a hysterical body – the blanks, the gaps, the inconsistencies, and the sudden eruptions. The final merging of the two voices (the biographer's and *Orlando*'s) and the two texts (the biography and the poem), indicated in the merging of the two times (the time of the narration and the time of the narrative), unites the joke (as the novel was originally intended), the biography and the poem all in one. The female body which has engendered the female text proclaims its hysteria, through a borrowed male language, and at the same time escapes it by transforming this hysteria into ecstasy. This "greater ecstasy" comes when *Orlando* is finally capable of locating it in the poem, which had for centuries been carried close to her breast. Written in "white ink", the female text is engendered by and engenders a female body.