

Queer Love in Woolf's Orlando and Chu's Notes of a Desolate Man

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Pei-Wen Clio Kao,

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Abstract: In her article "Queer Love in Woolf's *Orlando* and Chu's *Notes of a Desolate Man*" Pei-Wen Clio Kao analyses Virginia Woolf and T'ien-Wen Chu's novels in the context of gender studies. Kao's reading of *Orlando* and *Notes of a Desolate Man* is an elaboration on homosexual sensibilities of both men and women based on the concept of *écriture féminine* in the context of patriarchy and the former's power of subversion and change. Kao's analysis results in the finding that while Woolf's *Orlando* is more attuned to the feminist discourse based on an extended Western project in its period and movement to destabilize patriarchal ideology, Chu's *Desolate Man* can be read as the positive force of self-examination and self-transformation empowered by feminist awareness and by concerns about (homo)sexual equality.

Pei-Wen Clio KAO

Queer Love in Woolf's *Orlando* and Chu's *Notes of a Desolate Man*

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* and T'ien-Wen Chu's *Notes of a Desolate Man* address gender issues and anatomize sexuality in terms of homoeroticism. In *Orlando* sex changes advocate a love that transgresses gender boundaries and in *Desolate Man* a first-person gay-male narrator proclaims queer love. *Orlando* is fraught with homosexual undertones, exploring the nature of gender difference and sexual identity. With Orlando's sex change set in the centerpiece of the novel's narrative, one may be ready to argue that by changing genders Orlando is able to enjoy and reflect upon the differing positions and experiences of each gender as an androgyne (see, e.g., Marder). Nevertheless, such haste of reading *Orlando* as an androgynous text may deflect the reader from the writer's feminist concerns: Woolf brings "feminism squarely into the queer realm by confronting the sexually ambiguous protagonist with his/her own complicity in the misogynist sex/gender system and by encouraging a feminist conversion experience" (Hankins 182). In Woolf's unconventional representation of sexuality and gender differences, her protagonist's sex changes imply a love that transgresses the fixed boundaries of gender divide. Apart from Orlando's sex change, her romantic relationships with people of both sexes also marks the feminist challenge to the traditional heterosexual romance. The dramatic transformation of Orlando's gender identity tells something about the "performance" of gender itself and from this perspective gender identity appears as subjectivity whereby gender can be considered "as a corporeal style, an 'act' ... which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 190). Nevertheless, it is not to say gender can be performed completely at one's own free will, independent of historical constructions and configurations. Thus Judith Butler understands "gendered bodies" and "styles of the flesh" as "never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities" (*Gender Trouble* 190). Reading *Orlando* based on Butler's poststructuralist concept of gender difference, Orlando's sex changes not only expose the way gender norms are internalized and constructed as natural, but also affirm the possibility of a "self-willed" gender performance that could transgress the boundaries of gender differences regulated by compulsory heterosexuality.

Orlando's romance with the Russian princess Sasha is engraved in his/her mind and the memory of Sasha's mysteriousness and seductiveness last as long as Orlando lives. Orlando is unable to tell whether Sasha is a man or a woman, for her height and her clothes make her appear androgynous. Orlando is attracted to Sasha as an "individual," entirely separate from the fact about her "gender." In this sense Woolf is trying to capture the ambivalent nature of sexual orientation and her infatuation with Sasha apart from the fact of her "gender" may be clarified by Eve Kossofsky Sedgwick's elaboration of the "universalizing model" of homosexuality (on queer theory and literature, see also, e.g., Alexander and Meem; Alley; Breen Sönser; Vasvári). In contrast to the "minoritizing model" of homosexuality which assumes an essentialist gay identity, a "universalizing position" holds that homosexuality as the universalizing tendency in all human beings. Therefore, bisexual orientation is possible in every individual (on bisexuality including discussions on *Orlando*, see, e.g., Garber). Orlando's second romantic affair with the transvestite Archduke Harry, whose disguise as the Archduchess Harriet is depicted with comic and lighthearted touches. The Archdukes' same-sex desire for Orlando as a man and his cross-dressing in order to approach Orlando is narrated with homoeroticism. The sexual courtship of the transvestite Archduke has become a theatrical performance, role playing on the stage, which is invented by him and transgresses the sexual roles assigned by heterosexuality.

Woolf's representation of Archduchess Harriet and her playful tone in rendering this episode are associated with gay drag's aim to mock sexual identity: "the loss of the sense of 'the normal' ... can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when 'the normal,' the 'original' is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one can embody" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 189). The subversive nature of drag is to destabilize "originality" or "truth" of heterosexual identities:

Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequences of the imitation itself. ... the "reality" of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as an origin and the ground of all imitations. In other words, heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic, idealization of itself — and failing. (Butler, "Imitation" 21)

When Orlando undergoes sex change and becomes a woman, she is faced with the fact or the "burden" that, as a woman in the Victorian England, she has to "yield completely and submissively to the spirit of the age, and take a husband" (*Orlando* 120). Being a woman writer in conservative early-twentieth-century British society, Woolf asserts her defiance by having Orlando an unusual marital relationship. Orlando's marriage with Shelmerdine is unique, for they have many qualities of the opposite sexes. If it is the "differences" within the repetition of gender norm that makes the subjectivities of Orlando and Shelmerdine "unstable," then it also opens up the possibility of multiple gender identifications and multiple sexualities that endows the couple with qualities of the opposite sex.

T'ien-Wen Chu uses a first-person gay narrator to recount the latter's autobiographical stories of homosexual love, his metaphoric journeys through encyclopedic books, and his journeys around the globe. The "Desolate Man" is named Shao, who is in his forties, a homosexual, possibly a college teacher, and a second-generation Mainlander descendant born and living in Taiwan. The book has been awarded the "1994 *China Times* Million-Priced Novel" and rated as one of the "Top Ten Great Books of the Year" of Taiwanese literature. Consequently, with fame and aesthetic merits, the novel is worshiped by Taiwanese gay men to fortify, as well as celebrate their homosexual identity (Wei-Cheng Chu 141). The historical context of the novel is the Taiwan of the 1990s, a society with relatively open-minded and tolerant attitude toward homosexuality compared to the conservative atmosphere of the post-War England. Owing to the difference of historical period, in contrast to Woolf's homosexual undertones and reluctant self-censorship in representing erotic, as well as ideological passages, T'ien-Wen Chu's work is outspoken and straightforward in her treatment of homosexual ideas and queer love. Wei-Cheng Chu affirmed the awakening of the once marginalized homosexual awareness expressed in *Desolate Man* and the ambivalence, as well as rebelliousness, conveyed in its narrative (146). On the other hand, Wei-Cheng Chu also points out the gay narrator's condemning attitude toward sexual activists or gay rights campaigner, such as his ex-lover Ah Yao, who was dying of AIDS (146). This reactionary attitude in fact originates from Shao's conservative stance over politics, racial or gender alike. His defeatism and self-doubt comes from his own sense of insecurity and guilt over his homosexual orientation. This point of view seems to indicate the pessimism and skepticism over gender issues by T'ien-Wen Chu beneath the iconoclastic veneer of a "gay story."

The main ideas in *Desolate Man* are the opposition to (homo)sexual activism or any political radicalism; the belief in the myth built up by heterosexual hegemony concomitant with a deep sense of self-distrust about one's homosexuality; and the faith of religious transcendence to escape mortality and sufferings (Wei-Cheng Chu 145). All such self-contradictory and self-defeating attitude can be said to be rooted in the gay narrator's admiration of or indoctrination by the dominant heterosexual ideology. Nevertheless, T'ien-Wen Chu's overall agenda cannot be so simplistic and determinate. Throughout the novel, we can sense an ambivalent attitude toward gender issues and gender equality: the self-proclaimed queer lover is in conflict with his hankering for a kind of "heterosexual" redemption that may be endowed by religious enlightenment and passive acceptance of our mortal fate. On the one hand, Shao braved his manifesto of an "erotic utopia" for all homosexuals: "There, sex would not have to shoulder the mission of procreation, so there would be no contractual demand on either partner, and gender difference would no longer matter. Women with women, men with men, in a sexual realm where all barriers would have been dismantled, exploring sex together and the borders of the borders of sex, as far as they wanted to go. Sex would now be removed from the primitive function of childbearing, sublimated until sex become its own objective, an erotic nation built upon sensuality, artistry, aesthetics" (*Notes* 45).

On the other hand, Shao's envisioning of the homosexual paradise is eclipsed by his lament over the ephemeral nature of any of the homosocietal campaign or ideals: "I seemed to understand that

many erotic nations must have appeared in the course of human history. They were like exotic flowers that disappeared after blooming but once. Later generations could only dimly detect their existence amid vanishing, decaying texts, for they could neither expand nor grow. They become extinct in the frozen sorrows of indetermination and slow degeneration" (*Notes* 45). Shao's seemingly self-defeating and anti-activist position may be salvaged as one branch of queer discourse if we compare his attitude with Leo Bersani's in "Is Rectum a Grave?" where he expresses his distrust of gay activists in its implicit risk to downgrade and homogenize the traits of "gayness," a sacrifice of distinctive gay sexuality by "politics of assimilation" (on Bersani and gay literature, see, e.g., Champagne). Instead, Bersani is entertaining an ethical vision in which an idealized social relation is built upon the abnegation of the self or "a more radical disintegration and humiliation of the self" (24). In Bersani's framework "anal sex" is the core imagination of gay sexuality which is not identified with any particular sexual positions. Bersani's vision of a self-shattering and self-annihilating status can be associated with Shao's incessant quest of religious enlightenment where the Buddhists are blessed with Nirvana, the highest status of self-annihilation.

Furthermore, Shao's intellectual adoration of Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology in its teachings of kinship system and marital genealogy also explains his self-doubt as a homosexual along with his admiration of the marital myth established by heterosexuality. Shao is more than once occupied by Lévi-Strauss's theory of "matrix algebra model," in which "three-element kinship system, comprised of blood relation, adoption, and marriage, is transformed into a complex web of relationships by multiplication and inheritance" (*Notes* 38-39). Despite this kind of pessimistic vision conveyed by the gay narrator in his betrayal of his homosexual comrades, Wei-Cheng Chu has suggested to adopt a kind of "dissident reading" proposed by Alan Sinfield to dig beneath the surface, to excavate the embedded message in the text. If the gay narrator is dubbed by the author as a "desolate man," then is it possible that his "desolate" and "degenerate" status of being is associated with his incompetence to accept the necessity and the rebelliousness of the homosexual subculture in the crusade against heterosexual violence? If this kind of reading is logical and justified, then the real "moral lesson" conveyed by the author is to champion the "coming out," the defiance, of all queers to resist the injustice and oppression of heterosexuality. Shao's worship of structuralist anthropology's universal of the kinship system undergoes an unexpected twist within the frame of "dissident reading." Sinfield points out the "inter-involvement of resistance and control" in any structures: "Any position supposes its intrinsic op-position. All stories comprise within themselves the ghosts of the alternative stories they are trying to exclude" (41). In this sense, any dominant structure is inextricable from the dissident elements from within itself and it is from this gap that "dissident reading" may stand the dominant structure on its head. Accordingly, one is prompted to question the certainty of the "desolate man" in his admiration of patriarchal kinship systems: could it be possible that his gesture is to "mimic" or to "parody" the patrilineal structure through his quasi-marital relationship with Yonjie, lasting for seven years? In Shao's "gay marriage" with Yonjie, we can discern that the "homosexual" kinship system is associated with the dominant structure and that it undermines its universality. Henceforth, we can discriminate irony in Shao's and Yonjie's pathetic and desperate quest for a "monogamous relationship" which serves to debunk the hegemonic exclusivity of the heterosexual system of marriage under the hypocritical guise of church sacredness: "Yesterday we went to a mass at St. Petersburg's Basilica. It was the five o'clock evening service, so there weren't many people around. The pipe organ started up first, like angels' wings descending from the towering ceiling. I took Yonjie's hand and held it tight. A line of clergymen in white robes and red vestments walked past us up the aisle on their way to the altar. Yonjie responded by squeezing my hand even tighter; we were like a bride and groom joined together before God. Since we had no place in the marriage system in this world, why not join our lives together here in this domed church, designed and begun by Michelangelo, even though it took a hundred years to finish?" (*Notes* 55).

The language of narration used by Woolf and Chu in *Orlando* and *Desolate Man*, respectively, are poetic and lyrical and full of imagery. Both writers unfold their narratives in poetic and ethereal styles distinguished from texts by men and we can discern in the novels the legacy of *écriture féminine* — in the case of Woolf of course *avant la lettre*. Historically, *écriture féminine* is located in French feminists' resistance against "Western thought" that "has been based on a systematic repression of women's experience" (Jones 361). Their political and literary agenda has inspired and encouraged women

writers "to change the position of women that fail to address the forces in the body, in the unconscious" (Jones 361). Starting from Julia Kristeva's "semiotic discourse," they have stressed the "gestural, rhythmic, preferential language" of revolutionary fe/male writers, in order to re-experience the 'jouissance' connected with the 'blissful infantile fusion' with the mother (Jones 362-63). Luce Irigaray also calls for female consciousness of "the facts of women's bodies and women's sexual pleasure," for women have to "recognize and assert their *jouissance*, if they are to subvert phallogocentric oppression at its deepest levels" (Jones 364). Hélène Cixous's lyrical and gushing manifesto of *écriture féminine* is a declaration of the primacy of "the multiple, specifically female libidinal impulses in women's unconscious and in the writing of the liberatory female discourse of the future" (Jones 366).

Cixous's lyricism and imagery in "The Laugh of Medusa" not only corresponds to the "poetic tendency" in Woolf's works, but also prophesies the complex piling of sensual images and cadent phrases in Chu's *Desolate Man*. In an analysis of Woolf's lyric experimentalism Jane Goldman argues that Woolf was trying to combine the poetic tendency with the "violent moods of [her] soul," in terms of an "expression of an intensely subjective emotion or spirituality" (49). *Orlando* is fraught with "citations of poetry and with references to poetry making and poets, historical and fictional" (Goldman 55). *Orlando*'s composition of the pastoral poem "The Oak Tree" is paralleled with her struggle for identity and character development. What was once an overly ornate mythological drama turns into a beautiful and mature poem. Woolf's lyrical and feminine writing is an inextricable part of her political engagement: "experimentations with the poetical in her novels are bound up with her feminist interventions in the politics of gender, class and empire. She recognized these politics at work in the concepts of the poet's 'personality,' and the transcendent lyric subjectivity of Romanticism" (Goldman 50). With regard to *Notes of a Desolate Man*, David Wang, Liang-ya Liou, and Wei-Chen Chu point out the "mannerism" of T'ien-Wen Chu's self-indulgent poetic style and diction. Wang writes that a "literary metallurgy" is conjured up by Chu's complicated poetic, as well as sensual imagery and her encyclopedic allusions to classics. In *Desolate Man*, the ideas of "words, literary creations, and sexual drive" (Wang 8-9) are interwoven to produce a magnificent, amazing tapestry of the fin-de-siècle aesthetics, that is, the modernist legacy Chu inherited from her Western, as well as Chinese literary masters: "I am still alive. I feel as if I should do something for people like me, for those who have died. But I really can't do anything for anyone. I must write. Write in order not to forget. Time will eventually wear out, erode, annihilate everything. I cannot bear the thought that my memory of Ah Yao will slowly disappear as time goes by, to the point of total oblivion. ... My only option is to write; in the continual process of writing, I will gouge my wound over and over, lash the scar of my sins, and lock up the memories with pain, so they will never slip away. I write, therefore I am. When I can no longer write, I will throw down my pen, and to hell with it, for I'll no longer be able to lay claim to emotions, consciousness, or form" (*Notes* 24-25). And Kimchew Ng suggests that T'ien Wen Chu follows the literary tradition of Lancheng Hu, whose view of literature as religious redemption has inspired Chu to start from literary creation to transcend subjective position. Following this literary spirit, Chu in *Desolate Man* has not only fulfilled the praxis of *écriture féminine* to spell out the unconscious, the bodily images of women's *jouissance*, but has also restored the Chinese literary tradition to save the suffering and miseries of the community by the healing, and even didactic, power of literature.

Apart from their similarities in subject matter and narration, *Orlando* and *Desolate Man* are distinguished from each other by their West/East and modernity/postmodernity divide: the two novels manifest their own distinctive cultural meanings and contextual significance. Woolf's *Orlando* reflects the social ambiance of post-World War I England, an imperialist empire passing from Victorianism to modernism at the early decades of twentieth century. The passing of the empire together with the burgeoning Women's Liberation Movement heralds the emancipation of human rights from subordination. The progress of history promises the possibility of change, reflected in the optimistic and humorous tone of *Orlando*. With this progressive and optimistic mindset, the playful cross-dressing sex changes through time-spatial movement accompanied with self-growth are indicative of the performativity of gender and sexual identity as explained by Butler. Woolf's *Orlando* mocks all normative sex and gender codes, transforming "reality, and history, into a theatre of seemingly infinite, protean possibility" and challenging the "difference between normality and deviance" (Parkes

436). Woolf defies the concept of sexual identity as essentially stable and psychologically interior, the stance held by Radclyffe Hall about lesbianism. As Adam Parkes puts it, in contrast to Hall's insistence about interior "facts," Woolf "exploits the theatrical properties of sexual identity to create a whole world of performance that renders the rhetoric of sincerity [by Hall] ever doubtful" (436). In doing so, Woolf not only escapes the hostile and censorious eyes of the public discourse of her time, but also "anticipates Butler's critique by interrogating and transforming the discursive practices that constructed lesbianism" as biological "sexual inversion" (Parkes 436). According to Merry M. Pawlowski, in her introduction to *Orlando*, Butler holds an anti-essentialist assumption about lesbianism, urging female homosexuals not to "consecrate femininity or signal a gynocentric world" (xi) and Butler's contention of the performativity of gender is realized through "a repetition and a ritual" with produced "effects" in a "culturally sustained temporal duration" (Pawlowski xv). Further, Pawlowski argues that Butler's analysis of "drag" "the view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Pawlowski xv). Butler debunks the myth of heterosexual normativity by pointing out the "constructedness," as well as the theatrical effects of gender norms, "what we take to be an 'internal' feature of ourselves is one that anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, and hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures" (Pawlowski xvi). Drawing on the Foucault's framework of sex as the constructed effects, Butler points out the "political and discursive origin of identity" to refute the "psychological core" or "ineffable interiority" of the gendered subject's true identity:

That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the "integrity" of the subject. In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. (*Gender Trouble* 185-6)

The passage delineating Orlando's sex change along with her "change of clothes" demonstrates Butler's theory of the performativity of gender and the "theatrical effects" produced by gendered body and gestures. In the fictional biographer's impressive aphorism that "it is clothes that wear us and not we them," we are made aware that the change of gender behavior hinges on the change of clothes, the change of external apparatus: "they change our view of the world and the world's view of us" (*Orlando* 92). It seems in order to change from male to female role and vice versa, Orlando has only to wear different clothes: "there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mould of arm or breast, but they mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking. So, having now worn skirts for a considerable time, a certain change was visible in Orlando, which was to be found, even in her face. If we compare the picture of Orlando as a man with that of Orlando as a woman we shall see that though both are undoubtedly one and the same person, there are certain changes" (*Orlando* 92). This passage suggests the possibility of freedom, of liberation from the bodily inscriptions of the heterosexual regime. Parkes notes that "roles may be determined merely according to whatever clothes are available: that is, they may be arbitrarily imposed from without. If clothes wear us, then we are constructed, and potentially censored, by some external agency ... by the sexual hierarchy that assigns particular clothes to the male and female roles" (452). It is in Woolf's humoristic touch that has prophesized Butler's thought in *Gender Trouble* and other projects to combat the violence of all gender norms: "The dogged effort to 'denaturalize' gender in this text emerge ... from a strong desire both to counter the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex and to uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality that are informed by ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality" (Pawlowski xxi).

In the last chapter of *Orlando*, Woolf imagines a multiplicity of selves contained in one person: "For she [Orlando] had a great variety of selves to call upon, for more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand" (153). Before poststructuralism, Woolf has

entertained the anti-essentialist view of human nature and personal identity and she has foreseen the multiplied, multifarious selves never fixed to an original, essential nature. Parkes affirms Orlando's "sex change" as the "most dramatic ... manifestation of this multiplicity" and that "foregrounds the principle of uncertainty underpinning the novel's structure, displaying its transgression of historical and logical norms" (449). Orlando's process of performativity offers the possibility of change, of freedom from historically assigned social roles.

In contrast to Woolf's optimistic and lighthearted euphoria in dealing with gender difference and gender norms, Chu's *Desolate Man* is enveloped by a tone of nostalgia, of lament, of pathos. Contextualized in the post-Martial Law period of Taiwan, Chu's work reveals a nostalgic reminiscence of the lost good old days, as well as the totalizing impact of the Martial Law period. This anxiety over the transition from modernity to postmodernity is projected to the uncertainty and self-doubt of the gay narrator whose mixed awe and adoration of heterosexual hegemony could not be appeased by his queer love and queer identity. In addition to "dissident reading" I argue for in order to justify Chu's self-contradictory representation of homosexuality and queer identity, I advocate an allegorical and political reading of *Desolate Man*, a reading that is concerned with the writer's own dissatisfaction with and defiance against the political status quo of Taiwan. According to Liang-ya Liou, Chu's work reveals a nostalgic hope to return to the modernist period of Taiwan and the aesthetic modernism as well, but simultaneously and inadvertently identifies with capitalist commodity culture of Taiwan society: she seems to be trapped in the interim between modernity and postmodernity and vacillating between her attachment to the totalizing order of Martial Law period and her welcome attitude to the liberating force of the capitalist consumer society (Liou 8). Chu examines the racial, generational, and sexual, as well as erotic issues of contemporary Taiwanese society, while at the same time the subject of homosexuality seems to be overshadowed by the importance of its political allegory. In Chu's representation of the marginalized, self-denying "Desolate Man," the pathetic sense of exile and ostracism can be interpreted as the resentment of the Mainlander descendants over their political decline and the demise of the ideological mainstream of "One China" in Taiwan. The allusion to T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" is indicative of the decadent, the lost, and the nostalgic sentimentalism over the irrevocable modernist order and aesthetics. The gay narrator's nostalgia for the military period of Taiwan is illustrated in Shao's respect for the "Great Man" — i.e., Chiang Kai-Shek — his rule and his government. Totalizing order is mystified and glamorized as the "universalizing order" of truth and beauty, the good old days when there is no ideological split or political dissension with regard to Taiwan's destiny: "There was no identity issue, for God was in his heaven, with the golden-structure that Lévi-Strauss had pursued all his life. A world I longed for, one, I thought might exist only in the collective dream of human race ... While we praised the beauty and solemnity of the endless order, did we have a space of our own in the orderly realm of Bach's music, where everything has its place and its master, where men are men and women are women and the planets move silently in their natural orbits? Or were we simply exceptions, something to be excluded?" (*Notes* 38).

Liou proposes that Chu appropriates the anti-nationalist and anti-patriarchal stance of gay men to express the pathetic sense of uprootedness of the Mainlander descendants in Taiwan without motherland, without home, without identification (17). The issues of personal identity are never stopped at the level of gender identity; more often, identity is associated with the split racial, as well as national identities between restoring Taiwanese culture and Mainlander culture. Nevertheless, Liou also points out the feminist awareness of Chu's work of the subtle description of sensual experiences and in Chu's indulgence in the "politics of details." Such celebration and embrace of feminist and womanly awareness seems to contradict her racial awareness, for the latter is controlled and overcome by the complex about the "Great Man," whose totalizing patriarchal authority she expresses nostalgia for (Liou 14). On the other hand, the common marginalized destinies in a patriarchal society nonetheless set up the continuity between gay men and lesbian women. The dream of modernist felicity of universal values and the embrace of a grand narrative is in its constant conflict with the acceptance of the liberating force of postmodernity. At best, I suggest, this contradictory voice in *Desolate Man* can be read as the positive force of self-examination and self-transformation empowered by the feminist awareness and by the concerns over (homo)sexual equality.

In conclusion, my reading of *Orlando* and *Notes of a Desolate Man* is an elaboration on homosexual sensibilities of both men and women based on the concept of *écriture féminine* in the

context of patriarchy and the former's power of subversion and change. In my comparison of the two texts it seems that Woolf's *Orlando* is more attuned to the feminist discourse based on an extended Western project of the period and movement to destabilize patriarchal ideology. As Patricia Morgan Cramer has put it: "Woolf's novels are passionately concerned with female sexuality, especially the role of male sexual abuse in women's subordination and the liberating possibilities of lesbian love" (182). Therefore, in Woolf's work we can catch the clear-cut outline to challenge gender norms and to envision a "completely changed non-hierarchical society" (Cramer 183). Nevertheless, equipped with a critical eye and acute response to re-read Chu's *Notes of a Desolate Man*, one can sense anti-traditional ideals and political engagement conveyed in the her ambiguous narrative. Tai-Wei Chi's interpretation of the novel from the discourse of diaspora has lent credence to the subversive and unsettling force of the novel against heterosexual hegemony. Positioned and combating from the marginalized space of queer subculture, the exiling, wandering, and travelling gay narrator has the potential to bring forth political transformation and to change the binary relation of sexuality. Through the encounter with Woolf's "liberationist and egalitarian ideals" embodied in lesbian sensibility (Cramer 184) and with Chu's anti-traditional ideas of patriarchy hidden in her aesthetic labyrinth of allusions and images, I hope my study could in some way fulfill the mission of feminist criticism "to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision" (Showalter 141).

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