

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Orlando (1992)

Sally Potter

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OVERVIEW

Auteur The English screenwriter and director Charlotte Sally Potter is most renowned for her adaptation of Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando*, an example of narrative and visual ingenuity. She was born in London on 19 September 1949. Her mother was a musician, and her father was a designer and poet. Potter spent time with 'Hunny' Quennell and her other grandmother, both of whom were actresses and critical figures in her early life. She dropped out of school at 16 to direct films; she had studied composition and other arts at St Martin's School of Art and London School of Contemporary Dance. She used film's temporal and spatial qualities to experiment with form in her early work for the London Filmmakers' Co-operative late in the 1960s. She also has a broad artistic background in dance, choreography, and music. Her works often focus on gender, performance, and non-verbal cinematic language. Potter's *Orlando* has been exhibited internationally and nominated for Academy Awards and a BAFTA, among other awards. She co-founded a production company called Adventure Pictures with Christopher Sheppard.

Film The transformation of gender, the nonlinearity of time, and the development of history are all examined poetically in Potter's film. The story is a semi-fictional historiography about an Elizabethan English nobleman who transforms into a woman in midlife, lives centuries, and doesn't visibly age over time. The film stands out for its subtlety in approaching queer identity, as it explores society's imposed gender norms through the protagonist's metamorphosis. Potter's film is renowned for its elaborate costumes, wide angles, and use of direct address technique, which destroys the barriers and creates relationships between the viewer's effectively spaced space and the protagonist's inner space. *Orlando*, Potter's most avant-garde film, won the audience prize for Best Film at the 49th Venice International Film Festival in 1992 and was re-released in selected US theatres in August 2010. Potter effectively authenticates the movie by choosing Khiva, an old city in Uzbekistan, for the Istanbul scenes, especially when showing the Djuma Mosque's historical background. *Orlando* won more than 25 international awards and was nominated for Academy Awards: the Felix award from the European Film Academy for Best Young European Film in 1993 and winning first place honours from film festivals in St Petersburg, Thessaloniki, and many other parts of Europe. Potter's cinematic vision could rightly claim this groundbreaking film in its stylistic inventiveness and depth of its subject matter.

Background The attention to historical detail in production design – the sets and the costumes rendered specificity for the different eras on stage – was one of the things that made this film worthy of the acclaim it received. The casting of Tilda Swinton – who gave a multi-layered, elusive performance in *Orlando* – was one factor that received critics' praise for the film. *Orlando* stood out as an inspiration in feminist and gay cinema, appreciated for its outrageous storyline and the depth it brought to the portrayal of queer identities on screen despite the challenges in obtaining funding and distribution. The film

resonates with audiences and spurs debates about gender and social norms, confirming its role as a catalyst for larger cinematic discourse.

Storytelling Technique Potter uses direct addresses to the camera via Orlando's confessions and asides to involve the audience and establish complicity. This mirrors the stream of consciousness technique, allowing the audience to access Orlando's inner life, which is an integral part of the narrative in the active position. These direct addresses act as signposts for interpretation and turn the audience into active participants in such moments as Orlando's surprise at the Queen's gift and her remark about the Queen's fascinating character nature, navigations through the labyrinth of love, insight into a play, disillusionment with Sasha's betrayal, endeavours in the realm of poetry, the first encounter with death on the battlefield, or restrictions in society. The viewer is not a passive spectator but is engaged in the act of meaning-making. The audience thus enters a dialog with the film that creates a sense of community for themselves with Orlando's diegesis and is, therefore, co-creators of Orlando's journey through time, gender, and self-discovery through Orlando's direct addresses with the camera.

SYNOPSIS

Beginning in the Elizabethan era as a male nobleman, Orlando is favored by Queen Elizabeth I, who bestows upon him the gift of eternal youth to live four centuries. After Queen Elizabeth I's passing, Orlando becomes betrothed to Lady Euphrosyne. However, their engagement ends in heartbreak when Orlando falls in love with Sasha, a Russian princess. After a dalliance with a Russian princess ends in betrayal, a heartbroken Orlando falls into a deep, melancholic sleep, waking seven days later. Then, he is full of a passion for writing poetry. His literary aspirations, however, meet with disillusionment. Subsequently appointed as an ambassador to Istanbul, Orlando is drawn into politics and war, witnessing an enemy soldier's death that profoundly affects him, leading to another prolonged sleep. When he awakens, Orlando finds himself transformed into a woman. Now a woman, Orlando engages in debates with poets on the societal constraints on women with a lack of respect for women's intellect and place in society. After being declared legally dead as a woman, a suitor (Archduke Harry) proposes marriage, but Orlando flees, time-traveling to the Victorian era. There, she meets her first love, Shelmerdine, a freedom fighter with whom Orlando has a sexual encounter, and becomes pregnant, experiencing the turmoil of World War I. She loses her property, gives birth, and submits the manuscript she has been writing for centuries. Moving into the 20th century, Orlando, now a mother and a published writer, enjoys freedom on a motorcycle and visits her ancestral home, which is now a tourist attraction, reflecting on her life's extraordinary tapestry under the gaze of her own portrait. The story concludes under an oak tree, with Orlando, filmed by her daughter, expressing fulfilment with her extraordinary life.

CHARACTERS

<i>Orlando</i>	Orlando a nobleman commanded by Queen Elizabeth I to never grow old
<i>Queen Elizabeth I</i>	The monarch who grants Orlando the gift of eternal youth
<i>Sasha</i>	The Russian princess who becomes Orlando's love interest in the early part of his life
<i>Archduke Harry</i>	An aristocratic suitor who initially courts Orlando and later proposes marriage
<i>Marmaduke Bonthrop</i>	A sea captain who becomes Orlando's lover
<i>Shelmerdine, Esquire</i>	

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Orlando

Orlando, portrayed by Tilda Swinton, starts as an inquisitive and young daring nobleman of 16 in the Elizabethan era, enjoying the favor of Queen Elizabeth I. Over the span of the film, which covers nearly 400 years, Orlando only ages from 16 to 36 years, yet experiences significant shifts in identity, adapting to different societal norms of various eras.

Inquisitive – Orlando's quest for knowledge persists across four centuries. As a nobleman, Orlando is shown seeking knowledge and experience, displaying a natural curiosity about the world and the people in it. This eternal youth facilitates an extensive journey through time, allowing Orlando to accumulate a

vast array of experiences and insights. The character's inquisitiveness serves as a constant thread, guiding him/her through changing societal norms and personal transformations.

Adventurous – Orlando exhibits a zest for adventure, whether navigating the complexities of court politics or exploring the boundaries of love and identity. Amidst these epochal shifts, Orlando's adventurous spirit is tested. The Victorian era, in particular, poses a distinct challenge, presenting a divergence between Orlando's evolving identity and the era's stringent societal expectations. Yet, Orlando's adventurous nature persists, undaunted by the contrast, seeking a life of fulfillment and genuine connection. Orlando is a contemplative character who harbors a deep yearning for both life and affection.

Transformative – Orlando's transformation into a woman is portrayed as a pivotal moment, providing a new lens through which to view the world. Throughout this transformative odyssey, Orlando's introspective nature is foregrounded. A profound contemplation characterizes Orlando's existence, revealing a deep-seated longing for life's essence—love and connection. The convergence of Orlando's diverse selves over time and through multiple identities is managed with a quiet determination, leading to a matured unification of a once fragmented persona. This culmination of Orlando's transformative journey illustrates a harmonious blending of the many lives lived, both as a man and as a woman, into a singular, multifaceted individual.

Queen Elizabeth I

Queen Elizabeth I, portrayed by Quentin Crisp, stands as a commanding figure, exuding the grandeur and authority of the monarchy. Her decree grants Orlando the unique gift of eternal youth, a catalyst for his expansive journey.

Authoritative – Queen Elizabeth I's bearing is steeped in the very essence of command; every word and action carries the weight of royal decree. Her demeanor is marked by a regal assertiveness that commands respect and obedience, reflecting her powerful status.

Influential – The Queen's choices have far-reaching implications, affecting not just the present but setting the trajectory for generations to follow. Her decision significantly influences the course of Orlando's life, showcasing her immense sway over her subjects.

Majestic - Queen Elizabeth's appearance is an impressive figure that reflects the grandeur and authority of the monarchy. Her presence is the embodiment of majesty, with every garment, gesture, and expression. Queen Elizabeth's regal composure serves as the living symbol of her kingdom's enduring legacy and her unchallenged reign.

Princess Sasha

Portrayed by Charlotte Valandrey, Princess Sasha enters the narrative with an air of allure, drawing Orlando into a brief but passionate romance. Her presence is characterized by a spontaneous and captivating charm and mystery deeply affecting Orlando. Her relationship with Orlando unfolds with youthful exuberance, only to unravel, leaving a profound imprint on him.

Charming – Sasha's allure is immediate and powerful, drawing Orlando into a vivid romance that is as intense as it is fleeting. Sasha's charm is evident in her every gesture and word, radiating a warmth and ease that enchants those around her. Her magnetic charm is undeniable, weaving a spell of romanticism around Orlando's experiences and profoundly affecting his journey.

Mysterious – She embodies an air of enigma, never fully revealing her intentions or feelings, which adds to her magnetic pull on Orlando. Sasha entices both Orlando and the audience, leaving both to ponder the depths behind her captivating gaze. Sasha's mysteriousness is portrayed through her reserved expressions and the deliberate ambiguity of her speech, which keeps her internal thoughts concealed.

Impulsive – Sasha acts spontaneously, her decisions reflecting a desire for immediate gratification and adventure, ultimately leading to her abrupt departure. Despite the depth of connection, Sasha remains an ephemeral figure in Orlando's life. Her impulsiveness is shown in the spontaneity of her actions, like her sudden entrances and exits, which highlight her whimsical and unpredictable nature.

Archduke Harry

Archduke Harry, portrayed by John Wood, is depicted as a character who navigates the complexities of love and war throughout the film. In wartime, he appears beside Orlando, displaying a soldier's resolve by instructing Orlando to ignore a dying enemy. When faced with Orlando's transformation, Harry remains steadfast in his affection, proposing marriage to Orlando.

Valiant – Harry exhibits traditional valor on the battlefield, advising Orlando to leave a fallen enemy behind. His approach is pragmatic, yet it clashes with Orlando's compassionate instinct. He counsels Orlando with a soldier's practicality, displaying a stoic attitude towards the harsh realities of war.

Ardent – Despite Orlando's transformation, Harry's love remains unfazed. His impassioned proposal in the garden, where he declares Orlando to be the epitome of perfection regardless of gender, highlights his intense and unwavering affection. Harry's ardor is undiminished by the changing exterior of Orlando, reflecting a depth of feeling that transcends physical form.

Patriarchal – Harry's attachment to Orlando is not devoid of possessiveness. Post-proposal, his rhetoric shifts to an assertive declaration of ownership, tinged with the societal norms of his time. Harry's proposal to Orlando also embodies the traditional patriarchal views of his time.

Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine

Encountering Orlando post-transformation, Shelmerdine, played by Billy Zane, is portrayed as an adaptable and accepting presence. His character diverges from the rigid norms of the time, approaching Orlando and her unique situation with an open heart and mind. Shelmerdine is seen as a character who stands in contrast to others in the film due to his forward-thinking and accepting nature, which is pivotal for Orlando's experiences of freedom and self-expression.

Adaptable – Shelmerdine adapts effortlessly to Orlando's complex reality, embodying flexibility. He responds to the changes in Orlando's life without hesitation. He interacts with Orlando's new circumstances as if they were the norm, not showing any signs of discomfort or resistance to the changes she experiences.

Appreciative – Shelmerdine acknowledges Orlando's true self and celebrates her identity. His ability to recognize and value Orlando's essence beyond conventional labels stands out. Shelmerdine's appreciation is a profound recognition of Orlando's multifaceted nature, honoring her journey and evolution without reservation. He acts consistently towards her, indicating a recognition of her identity regardless of her external changes.

Adventurous – Shelmerdine shares Orlando's adventurous spirit, which is evident in his readiness to embrace the unknown and the unconventional aspects of their relationship. Shelmerdine and Orlando engage in activities together that show a mutual love for excitement and exploration. Shelmerdine is portrayed as ready and willing to join Orlando in her endeavors, suggesting a shared enthusiasm for new experiences.

THEMES

CHANGE

Time – Potter’s *Orlando* has an unusual structure. The film is segmented by subtitles and time stamps that include “1600 Death,” “1610 Love,” “1650 Poetry,” “1700 Politics,” “1750 Society,” “1850 Sex,” and “Birth”, parsing the narrative into thematic and historical sections. In the novel, time explicitly appears only in brief anchors sprinkled throughout the text, while the film immediately establishes the historical locale and time periods for every scene. This organizational method allows us to contextualize Orlando’s journey within both a historical and thematic context, shedding light on both his/her life and societal shifts, which serve as a plan for the narrative’s development. However, the movie’s opening prologue does not follow this formula, and instead sets a tone of timelessness and ambiguity. The final few seconds of the film also stand out as undated but made to show us Orlando in the modern period, with the sense that his/her travel is complete and the narrative is knotting off as Orlando rests in the contemporary world. Thus, it hints that Orlando’s journey to and from the future has been completed, and a direct connection is established.

Self-Discovery and Transformation – Orlando’s time-traveling journey is about self-discovery and transformation. The unconstrained ability of the character in question to transcend time and gender boundaries allows for a deep exploration of self-identity. The film underscores the importance of self-reflection, self-development, personal growth, and the courage to go against socially constructed structures, releasing individuals through centuries into more profound and better understandings of one’s true identity. The transformation from male to female is just an example of this form of development. As Orlando travels across time, each era brings new challenges and insights, contributing to the essence of the self. The film portrays this form of human development as a situation transcending time, gender, and culture. The film uses Orlando’s immortality to comment on eternally developing and self-identifying, the struggle to live and cope, and the human search and desire for meaning through the different historical periods.

SOCIETY

Gender b(l)ending

Queer Identity – Orlando’s gender alteration is both a transcendence and transformation; she breaks the pre-established boundaries of the gender binaries provided and questions the characteristics ordained as masculine and feminine in her culture. The film urges us to look beyond the strictly binary constituents of gender identity and acknowledges gender as an experiential spectrum.

Orlando’s perpetual youth and shape-shifting gender elucidate some of the complexities of the queer subject that forms identity relating to specific sociohistorical contexts. The experiences of Orlando, both as a man and a woman, reveal that identity is fluid rather than rigid. Orlando’s queerness allows the viewer to enter imaginative spaces to interrogate the boundaries of the self and to reimagine the rules that govern us on matters related to gender and identity. Queer identity as a lived narrative is shown to be transgressive, resistant, and never fully defined. Orlando’s chameleon-like human persona forces the viewer to reconsider what one might understand to constitute the self. The film taps into the notion that identity – particularly queer identity – is not static but continually mobile in becoming and can transcend temporal, cultural, and social boundaries.

Women in Society

Angel in the House – In the segment “1750 Society,” the film takes Orlando to the salons of 18th-century thinkers. Orlando, now a woman, finds herself in the midst of England’s intellectual elite, where societal views on gender are harshly debated. The scene is important as it first talks about critical themes pertinent to the gender models investigated and the societal roles implemented therein. Society presented in the film is a multifaceted examination of the perception of women in the era. The gathering of the male literati is a microcosm of the broader societal view where women are seen as lesser beings.

The contrast between the intellectual rigidity of her companions and Orlando's more fluid understanding of gender and identity is striking. Mr. Swift's declaration ("As our good friend Dr. Johnson says, every man is or desires to be an idler... Women have no desires, only affectation") dismisses the depth of women's aspirations and reduces their actions to mere pretence. Mr. Addison's comparison of women to children ("Indeed, women are but children of larger growth") and his objectification of women as ornamental creatures ("I consider woman to be a beautiful, romantic animal") further diminishes their humanity and autonomy. His disdain for his wife's intellectual pursuits is apparent; he opines, "who should be adorned in furs and feathers, pearls and diamonds." This line not only diminishes women's decorative status but also implies that their worth is tied to their aesthetic appeal rather than their intellect or character. Mr. Addison's attitude towards his own wife's intellectual ambitions unveils his contempt for educated women: "Apart my wife, of course, will insist on attempting to learn Greek, which is so very unbecoming." The term "unbecoming" here suggests that a woman seeking education transgresses the societal norms of femininity and attractiveness. His irritation is palpable as he admits, "I can hardly tolerate her company at the breakfast table. Why do they do it?" This rhetorical question exposes his incomprehension and intolerance toward the idea that a woman could seek intellectual fulfilment for its own sake rather than to please or appease men.

Silencing Women's Voices – Mr. Pope's words encapsulate the silencing of women's voices and the idealization of their silence: "Oh, every woman is, at best, a contradiction. And frankly, most women have no characters at all... Oh Lady is flame and silent. Perfect." This illustrates the societal expectation and preference for women to be seen and not heard, valued more for their aesthetic and beauty than their intellect.

Challenging the Status Quo – Orlando's resistance and challenge to these gendered behaviors and societal expectations, characterized as utterly unfeminine by her male companions, is announced when she directly addresses the contradictions in the men's perception of women as inferior: "Gentleman, I find it strange. You are poets, each one of you, and speak of your muse in the feminine, and yet you appear to feel neither tenderness nor respect towards your wives, nor towards females in general." Her remark highlights the absurdity and hypocrisy in the poets' idealization of the feminine ideal in art while simultaneously looking down on real women in their lives. Orlando's rejoinder to the poets' protest brings to light the shallow nature of their so-called regard for women. Mr. Pope's statement delineates the period's understanding of intellectual endeavors as a male-dominated pursuit: "The intellect is a solitary place. And therefore, quite unsuitable terrain for females who must discover their natures through the guidance of a father or husband." This shows how locked into the patriarchal discourses of the period were ideas about female dependency and the notion that women need male guidance to reach their full potential. Orlando's challenge to this assertion ("And if she has neither?") poses a critical question about the fate of women who lack a male figure in their lives, implicitly questioning the fairness and logic of such societal constructs. Orlando stands in opposition to these sentiments, questioning the implications of the prohibition on female work and the prejudice against female genius, which dictated that women were incomplete without a man in their lives. Mr. Pope's compassionate response ("Then, however charming she may be, dear lady, she is lost") reflects a grim outlook on the prospects for such women and is symptomatic of a deeply entrenched social prejudice against women who are constructed as innately weak and dependent, incapable of a fulfilled life, a role and an identity free from the tutelage, presence, and surveillance of a man.

Marriage as Ownership

Harry's interactions with Orlando after her transformation provide insight into society's rigid views on gender and sexuality. While he knew Orlando as a nobleman and as an ambassador, the transformation unsettles him, but his feelings persist despite societal conventions. This reveals a complexity in Harry's character that may reflect a broader societal confusion and discomfort with queerness and gender nonconformity. In this marriage proposal scene, the declaration by officials that Orlando is "legally dead" upon becoming a woman highlights how society negates individual identity and existence when it does not conform to established norms. The official states: "You are now female. Pending the legal judgment, however, you have the law's permission to reside in the property in the state of incognita." This highlights the institutionalized prejudice suffered by those whose gender expression or identity does not conform to

expected norms. The next resisting scene is the moment of Harry's proposal to Orlando, where we see how marriage was sometimes understood as a form of ownership rather than a partnership. His possessive language ("But, I am England, and you are mine") is an embodiment of patriarchal entitlement. Orlando's rebuttal to Her retort to Harry's proposal shows her willingness to defy possession, and it is an affectionate expression of self-sufficiency, autonomy, and independence. She refuses the idea that Harry's adoration implies ownership—a stark contrast to the language she once used for Sasha ("You are mine because I adore you") reflecting her past when she, too, as a man, held the societal power to claim. Orlando's reply ("And this means that I belong to you?"), in fact, explains the position of women in the society at that time. Harry's disparaging remarks following her refusal ("But Orlando with your history, quite frankly, who else would have you?") employs the threat of social isolation as a tactic to compel her into a marriage that would secure her societal position. It's a grim reminder of the economic and social vulnerability women faced, elevated by gender-change and all the more so when it's from one gender that carries rights and privileges into another that does not.

RELATIONSHIP

Love and Loss – Throughout Orlando's journey, love is a transformative and often painful force, yet it comes with the inevitability of loss. The relationships Orlando engages in, both as a man and a woman, underscore the impermanence and fluidity of human connections. The film explores various forms of love—romantic, unrequited, and maternal—and their impact on Orlando's personal growth. It also addresses the inevitability of loss, both in love and in the passage of time, highlighting the changes and emotional pain associated with these experiences. The film intricately weaves the theme of love, in its many forms, throughout Orlando's centuries-spanning journey. From the passionate yet fleeting romance with Sasha to the sublime maternal love of her later life, Orlando reveals that love shapes, defines, redefines, and transforms ourselves and our relationships.

Romance and Betrayal – The film explores the intense emotional experiences of love and deception. For example, in a pivotal scene, Orlando's offer to escape with Sasha—despite having betrayed his fiancée, Lady Euphrosyne, in plain sight—reveals the depth of his infatuation. This passion culminates in a planned elopement that never materializes, leaving Orlando grappling with Sasha's betrayal. His profound sense of loss and disillusionment is encapsulated in his bitter words upon waking from a seven-day slumber, indicting the female sex for the pain he has endured. The cycle of betrayal comes full circle as Orlando experiences the very treachery he inflicted upon his fiancée, highlighting the destructive potential of a love that blinds and consumes.

Love's Transformative Power – In a tender moment, Shelmerdine, recognizing Orlando's newfound freedom and lack of ties to position or possession, says, "Like a free spirit, unfettered by position or possession," highlighting love's ability to transcend societal roles. Their exchange touches on the complexities of gender roles and societal expectations, with Shelmerdine remarking, "If freedom must be taken, freedom must be won." Orlando reflects on the gendered expectations placed upon her, contemplating the sacrifices associated with the fight for freedom. She muses, "If I were a man, I might choose not to risk my life for an uncertain cause," revealing her internal struggle with the constraints of her previous male identity and the newfound challenges as a woman. Shelmerdine challenges these notions, suggesting that neither a man nor a woman should be confined by societal definitions: "If I was a woman, I might choose not to sacrifice my life caring for my children or my children's children or to drown anonymously in the milk of female kindness." The joy of their union is juxtaposed with the legal realities Orlando faces. She learns that the lawsuit regarding her estate is settled, her gender is declared female, and she stands to lose everything unless she produces a male heir. This underscores the inherent gender inequality of the time, as Shelmerdine reacts to the news, "So you're free." Orlando's introspection ("I think the spirit of this century has finally taken me and broken me") is met with Shelmerdine's encouragement to join him in seeking a future unburdened by the past. However, Orlando's dilemma, anchored in the privileges and choices tied to gender, reveals the complex interplay between love, freedom, and societal constraints. Orlando's transformation and the resultant shift in societal status underscore the loss of privilege, identity, and even love as relationships and societal roles are redefined. The film poignantly portrays how love and loss are intertwined, each leaving an indelible mark on Orlando's character and journey.

SCENES

Birth and Upbringing - The camera pans over the lush English landscape, resting on Orlando, who leans thoughtfully against a tree. The narrator provides context, stating, "There can be no doubt about his sex, despite the feminine appearance that every young man of the time aspires to." The camera captures Orlando's androgynous nature, consistent with the era's aesthetic, while the narrator, embodying Orlando's voice, informs the audience, "But when he—that is, I—came into the world, he was looking for something else." These words are delivered as Orlando maintains a contemplative and thoughtful gaze.



1600 DEATH

Queen Elizabeth I and Orlando - In the Elizabethan era, the scene presents us with the young nobleman Orlando, who is in the presence of Queen Elizabeth I. Set against the grandeur of the royal court, the Queen, portrayed with regal poise, directly addresses Orlando. She declares with authority, "I want you here in England with me. You will be the son of my old age and the limb of my infirmity. My favorite. My mascot."



The Gift of Longevity - In an intimate scene laden with the gravity of an ending era, Queen Elizabeth I, reclining and cloaked in the finery befitting her status, beckons Orlando to her bedside. In this moment of quiet intensity, she imparts a directive to the young nobleman: "For you and for your heirs, Orlando, the house ... but on one condition. Do not fade, do not wither, do not grow old," thus granting Orlando the gift of eternal youth.



Orlando's Quiet Rebellion - In the scene, Orlando and Lady Euphrosyne mirror the static figures in the painting, standing side by side and dressed in the ornate fashion of the era. In the aftermath of the Queen's death, a marriage and a career have been meticulously planned out for Orlando.



The Engagement Portrait of Orlando and Lady Euphrosyne

1610 LOVE

Skating Diplomacy: The Muscovite Ambassador's Reception - England grapples with an unprecedented frost, transforming the Thames into a solid ice expanse. Against this frosty landscape, an ornate tent glimmers under the evening sky. Members of the English court, dressed in period attire, engage in ice skating with the visiting Muscovite ambassador. They host a lavish feast in an ornate tent set upon the frozen river in a grand display of diplomatic flair.



Skating Serenity: Gliding on the Thames

Skating Love Dance - We observe Orlando and Princess Sasha skating closely during the Great Frost fair on the frozen Thames, immersed in the fair's vibrancy. The crowd watches; some comment directly: "My Lord Orlando, you are in danger of becoming a fool. You're ruining what could be the finest career in the land, and for what?" Another voice chimes in, "But don't you see in courting a Cossack, you're humiliating not only your fiancée but the entire female population of this country." Orlando, unheeding these warnings, displays his affection and fondness for Sasha openly in front of the eyes of his fiancée, Lady Euphrosyne.



Orlando's Dance with Sasha in the Ice Palace

Orlando's Betrayal - Euphrosyne confronts Orlando with visible disappointment after seeing Orlando's dance with Sasha, saying, "You betrayed me. The treachery of men." Then, Orlando breaks the fourth wall and speaks directly to the audience, stating, "It would never have worked. A man must follow his heart."



Euphrosyne's Confrontation

First Kiss - Orlando and Sasha share their first kiss. Following the kiss, Orlando appears contemplative, and Sasha, noticing this, asks, "Why are you sad?" Orlando replies, "Because - because I can't bear this happiness to end." Sasha responds to Orlando's expression of sadness with the observation, "Orlando, I think you suffer from a strange melancholy, which is you suffer in advance."



Orlando's Melancholia

Sasha's Betrayal - Orlando sees Sasha closely interacting with another person. Reacting to this, he confronts the man. Sasha responds to Orlando's concerns by suggesting he saw only "shadows" and calling the encounter an "illusion in light." Orlando expresses his deep feelings to Sasha, saying, "Sasha, I cannot think of a life without you. Stay with me. Don't ever go," and declaring, "You are mine, because I adore you." However, when they plan to meet and flee together at midnight, Sasha does not show up. The scene ends with Orlando expressing his feelings of betrayal with the words "the treachery of women."



Orlando's Retreat into Sleep - Orlando falls into a deep sleep that lasts for seven days. Upon waking, Orlando's first spoken words are, "I can find only three words to describe the female sex. None of which worth expressing."



1650 POETRY

Poetry - Orlando decides to pursue poetry and invites the famous poet, Sir Nicholas Greene to their house. Their discussion touches on Mr. Greene's financial struggles as a poet. When Orlando confesses his own poetic endeavors, Greene belittles him with, "Did I hear a mouse's squeak?" Greene also critiques contemporary writers for producing work solely for profit, lamenting that poetry in England is dead. However, when Orlando offers him a pension of "300 pounds per year, paid quarterly," Greene quickly becomes enthusiastic.

After reading Orlando's work, Greene harshly critiques it, saying, "Try as he might, this gracious noble lord who lifts his pen who thinks he then can write cannot. For who can pen when he is bored?" The scene concludes with Greene accepting the pension from Orlando, despite his mockery of Orlando's poetry, exemplified by "[T]his pretty knight, who feebly lifts his sword to make a witless thrust against his doom is foiled by what his noble affords." Orlando, visibly upset by Greene's mockery, asks the servant to discard the poem but still ensures Greene's pension is paid.



1700 POLITICS

Orlando in the Ottoman Empire - Orlando is appointed as the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century. Orlando arrives in Istanbul draped in exotic and opulent fabrics befitting.
Orlando as the British Ambassador in Istanbul.

War and Death In the midst of war, Orlando and Archduke Harry are on a battlefield in Istanbul, where Harry has just shot an enemy soldier. Confronted with the wounded man's suffering, Orlando defies Harry's command to "leave him" and refuses to abandon the soldier. Orlando, witnessing his first death, conflicted, defies Harry's dismissal by acknowledging the soldier's condition, saying, "This is a dying man." Unyielding, Harry reinforces his view: "He is not a man; he is the enemy."

Orlando's First Awakening as a Woman - Orlando falls into a prolonged sleep. This slumber also inadvertently saves Orlando's life, as robbers, mistaking him for dead, spare him. Upon awakening, Orlando discovers the transformation into a woman. In a moment of self-realization, while looking in the mirror, Orlando notes, "Same person. No difference at all," and then turns to the audience to add, "Just the difference of sex."



Morning of Orlando's transformation

1750 SOCIETY

The Mirror Scene Post-Transformation - We see Orlando post-transformation, now as a woman gazing into a mirror.



The Gaze of Becoming

Orlando's into the Literary World - Orlando, now in female form, is depicted in an 18th-century setting. She is seated, enveloped in an elaborate gown draping and pooling around her. With her gown ornate with floral adornments and ruffles, she is centered and poised amidst the grandeur of the room.



A Poetic Solitude

The Enlightenment's Edge - In a drawing room, Orlando engages in a lively debate with the poets of the era.



Contrast of Minds

Marriage Proposal - Archduke Harry offers a marriage proposal. He addresses Orlando's transcendent qualities; "To me, you were and always will be, whether male or female, the pink, the pearl, and the perfection of your sex."



An Offer Amidst the Garden

Time's Labyrinth: Orlando's Epochal Escape - Orlando runs through a hedge maze after escaping Harry's marriage proposal. The hedges are tall and intricately arranged, creating a labyrinthine environment. As Orlando runs, there's a visible change in attire and hairstyle, indicating a jump in time from the 18th to the 19th century. Orlando's costume alters to match the fashion of the new era they've entered.



The Maze of Transition: Orlando's Timeless Pursuit

1850 SEX

Nature's Matrimony and the Echo of the Future - Orlando runs through the landscape and suddenly falls. While lying on the ground, Orlando speaks to nature, "Nature, nature. I am your bride. Take me." Then she hears a horse approach, a man falls from his horse right in front of her and twists his ankle. It is at this moment that Orlando encounters Shelmerdine. He approaches with concern, asking, "You hurt, ma'am?" Orlando responds, "I'm dead, sir." The exchange quickly turns to a marriage proposal from Orlando, "Will you marry me?" Shelmerdine, taken aback, expresses his willingness, "Ma'am. I would gladly."



An Encounter of Kindred Spirits: Orlando and Shelmerdine

Orlando in Love Orlando and Shelmerdine share a moment of closeness. As they embrace, Orlando turns towards the audience, a look of blissful astonishment on her face, and declares, "I think I am going to faint. I have never felt better in my life."



In the Arms of Eternity

The Parting at the Crossroads Shelmerdine prepares to leave for America and liberty and invites her to join him. Orlando says that she “can’t just follow.”. They share a final kiss and embrace.



The Last Embrace

BIRTH

Rebirth of Orlando as the author: Orlando presents the final copy of her book to the publisher. She’s in a setting surrounded by tall buildings with expansive windows and a high-speed train in the background. She is seated cross-legged.



Orlando's New Chapter: Independence in Ink

Orlando in the 20th Century We see Orlando, now a mother, riding her motorcycle with her young daughter through the streets of a modern city. Wearing a dark leather jacket and helmet, Orlando controls her motorcycle as her daughter sits on a sidecar attached to the bike. The two are seen enjoying their ride, with the bustling city and its modern architecture in the background.



Orlando: A Portrait of Fluidity and Maternity

Orlando's Timeless Echo In the final moments of the film, Orlando revisits the grand house she has lost, now transformed into a museum. She wanders through the rooms, pausing to look at a portrait of herself from centuries ago. The portrait, which hangs prominently, becomes a point of interest for museum visitors, who stop to take photographs. The narrator directly speaks to the audience again: "She, for there can be no doubt about her sex, is visiting the house she finally lost for the first time in over 100 years." The narrator also highlights Orlando's timeless qualities: "She's lived for 400 years and hardly aged a day." The epilogue captures Orlando's transformation: "But she has changed. She's no longer trapped by destiny. And ever since she let go of the past, she found her life beginning."



Orlando: A Portrait Across Centuries

Orlando's Journey: A Celebration of Self We see Orlando seated beneath the same tree featured at the beginning. Orlando's daughter, with a camcorder in hand, captures her mother on film, and asks her why she's sad. Orlando insists, "I'm not. I'm happy," and diverts her attention upwards to an angel, Jimmy Somerville, singing in the sky. The angel's lyrics ("At last, I am free... to be free of the past and of the future that beckons me)" resonate through the scene along with the closing: "Here I am, neither a woman nor a man."



Orlando's Epiphany: *The Flight of the Golden Angel*

Discussion Questions

1. How does *Orlando* challenge traditional notions of gender and identity?
2. In what ways does the film use historical settings to comment on contemporary societal issues?
3. How does Orlando's character development reflect the human search for meaning and self-discovery?