

A photograph of two women with blonde hair, wearing matching royal blue suits. They are positioned in profile, facing each other. The woman on the right has her hands clasped in front of her. The background is solid black.

SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION

ON CUE

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Compiled by Hannah Brown.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Hannah Brown is the Education Projects Officers for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Hannah on

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ABOUT *ON CUE* AND STC

ABOUT ON CUE

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season. Each show will be accompanied by an On Cue e-publication which will feature all the essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences. For more in-depth digital resources surrounding the **ELEMENTS OF DRAMA, DRAMATIC FORMS, STYLES, CONVENTIONS and TECHNIQUES**, visit the STC Ed page on our website.

Such resources include:

- videos
- design sketchbooks
- worksheets
- posters

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 35 years later, under the leadership of Artistic Director Andrew Upton, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Sydney Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural

areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Geoffrey Rush, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

sydneytheatre.com.au

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

SUITABLE FOR
Years 11 and 12

SUBJECTS

Drama

English



Jacqueline McKenzie in rehearsal for STC's *Orlando*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

ORLANDO

FROM THE NOVEL BY VIRGINIA WOOLF
ADAPTED BY SARAH RUHL

DESDEMONA/MARMADUKE/CHORUS
MATTHEW BACKER

ELIZABETH/CHORUS
JOHN GADEN

SASHA/CHORUS
LUISA HASTINGS EDGE

ARCHDUKE/ARCHDUCHESS/CHORUS
GARTH HOLCOMBE

ORLANDO
JACQUELINE MCKENZIE

POET/OTHELLO/CHORUS
ANTHONY TAUFA

DIRECTOR
SARAH GOODES

DESIGNER
RENEE MULDER

LIGHTING DESIGNER
DAMIEN COOPER

MUSICAL DIRECTOR & COMPOSER
ALAN JOHN

SOUND DESIGNER
STEVE FRANCIS

DRAMATURG
KIP WILLIAMS

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
ALICE OSBORNE

ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER
ROSS GRAHAM

VOICE & TEXT COACH
CHARMIAN GRADWELL

PRODUCTION MANAGER
JOHN COLVIN

STAGE MANAGER
MINKA STEVENS

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
VANESSA MARTIN

HEAD MECHANIST
DAVID TONGS

SOUND OPERATOR
LUKE DAVIS

BACKSTAGE WARDROBE SUPERVISOR
ROSALIE LESTER

WIG STYLIST
NICOLA WATERS

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHER
HON BOEY

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHER
PRUDENCE UPTON

2 HOURS, NO INTERVAL

THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT
THE DRAMA THEATRE, SYDNEY OPERA
HOUSE, ON 13 NOVEMBER 2015

ORLANDO IS PRODUCED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH BRUCE OSTLER, BRET ADAMS LTD, 448 WEST 44TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10036.
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THE ORLANDO
DONOR SYNDICATE

SYDNEY
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CO

ABOUT THE PLAY

HE HAD BEEN KISSED BY A QUEEN WITHOUT KNOWING IT

Orlando is a woman, a young man, and a grand, epic adventure that transcends time, space and gender.

Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando* has been described as the most charming love letter in literature. Inspired by Woolf's affair with the author and aristocrat Vita Sackville-West, it is part biography, part fabulation, part poetry.

Now it has been brought to life by award-winning playwright Sarah Ruhl (*In the Next Room, or the vibrator play*) with all the luscious lyricism and playfulness of the original.

As Orlando's story unfolds, we glide effortlessly from Elizabethan England to Constantinople, waking up with ravishing Russian beauties and taking up with Romanian aristocrats, always with a wink in the eye.

The adventures pile up, as do the lovers, and somewhere along the line our hero becomes a heroine.

Orlando abandons herself to five centuries of change with an insatiable appetite to discover what it means to live fully in the present, in her own skin and in her own time.

STC Resident Director Sarah Goodes (*Switzerland*) and designer Renee Mulder (*Battle of Waterloo*) have created a bold, contemporary new production at Sydney Opera House for this light-hearted, gender-bending frolic through the ages.



Matthew Backer, Garth Holcombe, Sarah Goodes, John Gaden, Luisa Hastings Edge, Anthony Taufa and Jacqueline McKenzie in rehearsal for STC's *Orlando*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

ABOUT VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf was born Virginia Stephen in 1882. She and her sister Vanessa were home schooled by their parents and, in her adolescence, Virginia was given the run of her father's library. These hours of reading were her real education. Her mother died when Virginia was 13, and it was at this time that she first suffered symptoms of the recurrent mental illness which was to plague her life, rendering her physically

and mentally debilitated for long periods. Her father's death in 1904, when she was 22, set off another breakdown and a suicide attempt. However, after their father's death, Vanessa, Virginia and Adrian (her younger brother) moved into their own home on Gordon Square in Bloomsbury. It was to this house that her elder brother, Thoby, first brought his Cambridge friends – a gang which would later become the Bloomsbury group. Around this time, Virginia began to write regular articles and reviews for *The Guardian* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Virginia married Leonard Woolf, one of the Bloomsbury group, in 1912, after several months of hesitation on her part. When her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, was published in 1913, she became ill. After a slow recovery in Sussex, the Woolfs returned to London and settled at Hogarth House, where Leonard set up a small hand printing press in 1917. They both learned how to set type and, in time, what started as a hobby became a distinguished and flourishing publishing house, Hogarth Press. Virginia's third novel, *Jacob's Room* (1922) was the first fulllength book published by the Hogarth Press.

Orlando (1928) was written for and dedicated to Vita Sackville-West whom Virginia met in 1922. Somewhere between 1925 and 1929, their friendship developed into a love affair. Virginia's other major works include the novels *Mrs Dalloway* (1924), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *A Room of One's Own* (describing the barriers put in the way of women writers, 1929), *The Waves* (1931), and *Between the Acts* (1941, posthumous). With the advent of World War II, Virginia became increasingly depressed and feared she was about to become ill again. On 28 March 1941, she drowned herself in the river Ouse, leaving letters for Leonard and Vanessa on the mantelpiece. Her note to Leonard told him, "I owe all the happiness of my life to you."

(Sydney Theatre Company, 2015.)



CHECK OUT THE CLASSROOM HANDOUT TO FIND OUT ABOUT
THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP'S PRACTICAL JOKE!

THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP

“They lived in squares, painted in circles and loved in triangles.”

Dorothy Parker, American poet and writer

The Bloomsbury Group were a group of writers, artists and intellectuals who lived in the borough of Bloomsbury in London in the early part of the 20th century (Court Theatre, 2010). The central members of the group included Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, Vanessa Bell, Desmond MacCarthy, John Maynard Keynes, Roger Fry, E.M. Forster, Duncan Grant, Mary MacCarthy and Virginia Woolf. Previously, along with her sister Vanessa, Virginia Woolf had lived in the confinement of the family home in upper class Kensington with their half siblings, who were deeply bound to the expectations of society and did not agree with Virginia and Vanessa socialising with the ‘radical’ Bloomsbury Group. This prompted the sisters to move from their family home to Gordon Square, in the less exclusive borough of Bloomsbury, to pursue their careers and involvement with The Bloomsbury Group. It was here that Virginia met her husband, writer Leonard Woolf, and her sister Vanessa, a painter, met her husband Clive Bell, an art critic.

The group had liberal ideas about art, gender, feminism, pacifism, sex, sexuality, economics and history well before their time and made notable contributions to the cultural landscape of England (Wikipedia, 2015). The Bloomsbury Group’s disregard for the social expectations of Victorian society gave Virginia Woolf the freedom and inspiration she craved to flourish as a writer.



SYNOPSIS

Act 1: The Elizabethan age

Living in Elizabethan England, Orlando is a young man of sixteen with great legs who dreams of being a poet. He meets the aging Queen Elizabeth I, who falls in love with him and bestows on him titles and riches; young women fawn on him. Icy weather brings him in contact with a beautiful Russian princess – Sasha. They become lovers and plan to elope, but Sasha leaves for Russia without him.

Act 2: 17th century

Alone and heartbroken, Orlando struggles to write a poem called 'The Oak Tree'. Escaping the advances of an amorous archduchess, he takes a job as the King's ambassador in Constantinople. An orgy and a Spanish dancer named Pepita leave Orlando sufficiently exhausted to sleep for a week. He wakes up to find he has been robbed and is now a woman.

Act 3: 18th century

Orlando sails back to England, discovering the penalties and privileges of being female. She returns to writing 'The Oak Tree', while the amorous archduchess returns as an amorous archduke.

Act 4: 19th century

Submitting herself to the spirit of the age, Orlando takes a husband – a sea captain called Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine.

Act 5: The present

Orlando, now 36 years old, drives her car to go shopping, encounters the ghost of Queen Elizabeth I and, finally, finishes her poem 'The Oak Tree'.

(Sydney Theatre Company, 2015)



Jacqueline McKenzie in rehearsal for STC's *Orlando*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©



John Gaden in rehearsal for STC's *Orlando*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

FACT AND FICTION

A table outlining the world of the play in relation to the life of Vita Sackville-West

Orlando is biography by Virginia Woolf, which has been adapted for the stage by American playwright Sarah Ruhl. The character of Orlando is a magical and fictional version of Vita Sackville-West who engaged in a love affair with Virginia Woolf sometime between 1925 and 1928. The play spans over 300 years. During this time Orlando ages just 20 years and changes from a male to a female. Orlando's romp through time is brought to life on stage by Sarah Ruhl and director Sarah Goodes who manipulate a contemporary array of dramatic styles to create the fantastical worlds Orlando drifts through; each impacting on the creation of his/her gender identity.

THE WORLD OF VITA SACKVILLE-WEST	THE WORLD OF ORLANDO
Knole House is presented as a gift to Vita's ancestor, Thomas Sackville, from Queen Elizabeth I.	Orlando is a member of Queen Elizabeth I's Royal Court.
Vita begins a courtship with her suitor, Lord Henry Lascelles. The courtship ends as Vita finds Lord Henry boring!	Orlando meets Archduchess Harriet who later becomes Archduke Henry, both who represent Lord Henry.
Vita has a homosexual relationship with Violet Trefusis. Most of their love affair is conducted in the French countryside.	Orlando meets Princess Sasha of Russia.
Vita and Violet's affair ends. Vita accuses Violet of 'cheating' on her with her husband.	Orlando catches Princess Sasha sitting on the knee of the Captain of a Russian ship. Sasha sails away leaving Orlando behind.
Following her relationship with Violet Trefusis where she cross-dressed and used the name Julian, Vita begins dressing in androgynous clothes on a permanent basis.	Orlando falls asleep a man and wakes up a woman. A literal signpost to the death of the old self and the birth of a new one.
Vita's uncle inherits her family home, Knole, after her father dies. Vita is unable to inherit the estate as she is a woman.	The limitations of being a woman are revealed to Orlando when she is faced with two lawsuits denying her the right to property because she is "dead, and therefore cannot hold any property whatsoever," and also because she is "a woman, which amounts to much the same thing."
Vita is married to Harold Nicolson. Her marriage is used as a guise for her homosexual relationships. Her gender neutrality gives her the independence and freedom to live her life.	Orlando marries Marmaduke in order to conform to the 'spirit of the age.' Marmaduke's feminine understanding complements Orlando's masculine independence.
Vita turns 36, her relationship with Virginia Woolf ends. Her poem 'The Land' is published.	At the end of the play Orlando is 36. She is married to Marmaduke and her neutral sexual identity gives her the autonomy to finish the poem 'The Oak Tree.'

THEMES AND IDEAS

GENDER

At the beginning of the play, Orlando is a young man who then changes into a woman when he falls asleep for seven days after Princess Sasha leaves him. When Orlando wakes as a woman the Chorus say: "Truth, truth, truth. We have no choice to confess...he was a woman" (pg. 64). The change in gender symbolises that Orlando is neither male nor female but possessed both male and female qualities; she is described by the chorus as being able to "criticise both sexes equally as if she belonged to neither" (pg. 62).

When Orlando wakes up a woman, she is unfazed by the change. Orlando looks in the mirror and composedly walks to her bath; she is not at all disconcerted by her change in sex because she feels no different to before. In doing this, Woolf is making a statement about how one's biological sex makes no difference to a person and that it is the gender imposed upon them by society and cultural codes that changes people - "Orlando had become a woman there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been" (pg.62).

Woolf reiterates the idea that gender is a social construct when Orlando dresses as a female and realises "...the penalties and privileges of her position" (pg. 67) after being offered a chair by the Captain of the ship when sailing back to England. This chivalrous act shows how gender is a performance enacted through the wearing of certain clothes, social mannerisms and behaviours, as clothes "mould our hearts, our brains and our tongues..." (Carvetti, 1996).

The idea that gender is a performance determined by the clothes we wear is also communicated through the directorial choices in the production. In *Orlando*, male actors play female characters by simply putting on a skirt or a dress such as John Gaden who plays Queen Elizabeth I. Jacqueline McKenzie transforms from male Orlando to female Orlando also by changing costume. Her costume changes occur in full view of the audience with costumes lowered from the ceiling or brought on stage by other actors. This further reiterates how gender is a performance and that clothes influence our behaviour and how others behaviour towards us.

Throughout the 17th century Orlando learns that a woman's behaviour is to be "obedient, chaste and scented by nature" (pg.70). However, Orlando realises that this behaviour does not come naturally and is attained through "tedious discipline". She also how she should behave and the way men should behave around her – including not crying! (The Archduke receives a slap for that!) Orlando is also faced with

two lawsuits denying her the right to property because she is "dead, and therefore cannot hold any property whatsoever," and also because she is "a woman, which amounts to much the same thing". In these lines Woolf is explicitly stating the confines of being a woman.

When, as a woman, Orlando marries Marmaduke, she does so because he, like her, possessed both male and female qualities – "...it was to each such a revelation that a woman could be as tolerant and free-spoken as a man, and a man as strange and subtle as a woman" (pg. 103). Shel and Orlando's combination of feminine and masculine qualities make them a perfect match. For Orlando, her marriage conformed to the expectations of society while her male and female gender qualities create a comforting sense of self that allowed her to finish her poem 'The Oak Tree.' Many also believe that by Orlando finishing the poem as a woman, Woolf is suggesting "...that the creative imagination resides in the feminine quality of intuition" (Carvetti, 1996).

Ultimately the journey to the change in gender of Orlando is about a search for identity, which culminated for the two women in the realisation that gender fluidity allowed them to be free individuals uninhibited by the world's expectations of their gender.



Jacqueline McKenzie and Anthony Taufan in rehearsal for STC's *Orlando*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

TIME

In *Orlando*, time refers to the historical time periods over which the play occurs, as well as the social expectations that come with certain periods. The play stretches over 300 years, during which time Orlando ages just 20 years. Each era is contextualised by the chorus' narration, with lines such as "The age was Elizabethan. Their morals were not ours" (pg. 1 in the 16th century) or "...the muffin was invented and the crumpet. Coffee led to the drawing room in which to drink it..." (pg. 90 in the 19th century). The different eras are also signified through Orlando's change in costume that are each in different colours.

The enormous time period spanned in the play is in contrast to Orlando aging just 20 years and symbolises the massive internal journey that Orlando has undertaken by the end of the play. In each new century Orlando takes on a different role, from a member of the Queen's court in the 16th century to a married woman in the 20th century. In the final moments of the play in the 20th century, Orlando comes into contact again with Queen Elizabeth I and Sasha, symbolising how her many experiences have contributed to her current self.

In different time periods Orlando is restricted by the social mores of the age and changes in order to survive and be accepted in society. This occurs most notably in the 19th century. When Orlando feels a tingling in her second finger on her left hand, she "...submits to the spirit of the age and takes a husband" (pg. 92), as in society of the time she realised that wedding rings "abounded." As such, Orlando marries Marmaduke and her identity, which now consists of both male and female qualities, allows her to complete her poem.

Director Sarah Goodes describes the change in eras in the play as "...a circular one, where things could appear and disappear and slide from one century to the next, from the now to the then. A key quote we worked from came from the book: "Times passed over me... nothing was any longer one thing" (Sydney Theatre Company, 2015). The idea of Orlando sliding and moving from one century to the next is consistent with the motif of a ship that features in *Orlando*. The ship is symbolic of Orlando who floats from era to era (and indeed Orlando also travels on a ship in the play). The notion of a ship moving from one place to the next is also symbolic of the way the texts float between the biographically real world and the magical and fictional world of *Orlando* (Smith, 2006).

'THE OAK TREE' POEM

The poem forms a consistent narrative thread, as Orlando carries the poem through the ages until it is finished in the present day, showing how the poem is a record of the experiences that have shaped Orlando's self (Smith, 2006). One of the major themes of the play is the idea that a person's identity is comprised of many different selves. This is described by a chorus member at the end of the play when saying "For she had a great variety of selves to call upon: the boy who sat under the oak tree, the young man who fell in love with Sasha, the boy who handed the Queen a bowl of rose water, the poet, the fine lady, the woman who called Mar or Shelmerdine or Bonthrop..." (pg. 117). It is the experience of these many selves, both male and female, that have shaped Orlando and inspired the poem – "The Oak Tree."

At the beginning of the play when Orlando sits down to write under the oak tree, all he can write are lines that are simple and unimaginative. By the end of the play, Orlando is able to write poetically and uses symbolic and evocative language – "When the wave rippled, the spotted leaves fell slowly –" (pg. 125) Orlando is able to finish her poem as her journey to find her identity is essentially complete. Virginia Woolf is also making a point about the creation of art as an expression of the self.

An oak tree is featured on stage at the beginning of the play as a symbol for Orlando's journey. An oak tree is symbolic of strength and endurance which are both qualities needed across the ages in the formation of Orlando's identity.

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

A NEW TYPE OF BIOGRAPHY

After “[shaping] the modern novel by rejecting the narrative coherence of Victorian fiction” (Hoffman, 1968), Virginia Woolf similarly set out to change the way in which biographies were written. Woolf believed that a biography should not just document the life of a person based on their actions and work, but portray their personality, their emotions and their inner life. As such, in *Orlando: A Biography*, Woolf set out to examine the hidden and more obscure moments of Vita Sackville-West’s life. Her writing style was also notably different to a factual biography; Vita’s life was written poetically, with events and her personality fictionalised and portrayed in a fantastical style. This new approach was akin to the Modernist writers (including Woolf’s counterparts in The Bloomsbury Group) who communicated through symbols and relied on the reader to deduce meaning, as opposed to Victorian writers who more simply used language to say what they meant (Hoffman, 1968). Most notably, Woolf aimed in her biography of Vita to find a “...climactic inward event...unattended moments; or epiphanies” (Court Theatre, 2011) that acted as the turning point in Vita’s life and personality. This epiphany for Vita was her relationship with Violet that resulted in her androgynous dress and gender fluidity. This is depicted in the play when Orlando falls asleep a man and wakes up a woman.

Virginia Woolf’s father was a famous biographer. So, when she sat down to write *Orlando: A Biography* she was intentionally playing with and subverting the traditional form of biography. She believed that a person’s life could be divided into the husk and the atom. The husk was the order of events – the facts, the dates, the actions. The atom was the intangible spirit of a person – the subconscious forces that shape a life. Virginia believed you could never really understand a person knowing only their husk. She believed a little fact mixed with fiction is a great way of capturing the spirit of a person (Sydney Theatre Company, 2015).

“Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.” – Virginia Woolf in her essay ‘Modern Fiction’ (Sydney Theatre Company, 2015)

“The biographer is now faced with a difficulty which it is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over. Up to this point in telling the story of Orlando’s life, documents, both private and historical, have made it possible to fulfil the first duty of a biographer, which is to plod, without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth; unenticed by flowers; regardless of shade; on and on methodically till we fall plump into the grave and write finis on the tombstone above our heads. But now we come to an episode which lies right across our path, so that there is no ignoring it. Yet it is dark, mysterious, and undocumented; so that there is no explaining it. Volumes might be written in interpretation of it; whole religious systems founded upon the signification of it. Our simple duty is to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may.” – Virginia Woolf in *Orlando* (Sydney Theatre Company, 2015)

CHARACTERS

As *Orlando* is a biography of Vita Sackville-West key people from her life are represented by characters in the world of the play.

ORLANDO

(Vita Sackville-West)

“But listen...suppose Orlando turns out to be Vita.” – Virginia Woolf

Orlando is a biography of Vita Sackville-West, a woman who was born in 1892. The Sackville family's lineage went back to William the Conqueror and they were made Earls of Dorset in the 16th century. Vita's maternal grandmother was Pepita, a famous Spanish dancer and mistress of the second Lord Sackville. This diverse heritage fascinated both Vita and her many admirers. She fell in love with Harold Nicolson, a young diplomat, when she was 20, and they were married in 1913. Four years later, by which time they had two children (Ben and Nigel), Vita found out Harold was homosexual. She soon began a passionate affair of her own with Violet Trefusis (nee Keppel), a childhood friend. Vita and Harold's marriage eventually adjusted to a close companionship which accommodated their respective homosexual affairs and lasted until her death in 1962.

Vita Sackville-West was also a writer and much of her fiction deals transparently with her sexuality, including *Challenge* (1923), which portrays her affair with Violet in a thinly disguised plot. Today, Vita is better known for her life story and her gardens than for her writing. However, in the 1920s, when Vita and Virginia Woolf became intimate, it was Vita who was the more popular author. She was prolific: her poetry includes *The Land* (1926), *Solitude* (1938) and *The Garden* (1946); her novels *Heritage* (1919), *Seducers in Ecuador* (1924), *The Edwardians* (1930) and *All Passion Spent* (1931); she also wrote biographies and books on travel and gardening. She was well-travelled, spending time in Europe, North and South America, and Indonesia, as well as living in Turkey, Persia and Germany as a diplomat's wife. Vita is closely associated with two large estates: Knole, her childhood home and one of the largest and oldest houses in England; and Sissinghurst, the property she and Harold purchased in 1930. Sissinghurst features a now-famous garden lovingly created by Vita and Harold over 30 years. Vita died from cancer in 1962, aged 70 (Sydney Theatre Company, 2015).



Vita Sackville-West

CHARACTERS (CONT.)

PRINCESS SASHA

(Violet Trefusis, nee Keppel)

Violet Trefusis was Vita Sackville-West's lover between 1918 and 1920. The passionate love affair was described by Vita's mother as having "all the sensations of a novel." During their relationship the couple travelled to France in order to keep the scandal of their affair away from London society and their families. At this point in time, Vita had two sons to her husband Harold, and Violet was newly married to Denys Trefusis. In the final days of the affair, with gossip about their liaison growing, their husbands chartered a plane from London to retrieve them from the south of France. The tumultuous nature of Violet and Vita's relationship is captured in the line from *Orlando*, "But I do love thee! And when I love thee not, chaos is come again..." (pg. 44).

Vita's relationship with Violet was motivated by two major factors. The first was her desire to travel and escape the formalities of everyday life for a woman in the 19th century. Vita described this desire as "...a real wonderlust. I have a longing for new places, for movement, for places where no one will want me to order lunch, or pay housebooks" (Durham, 2013). The second factor was Vita's lust for Violet- "You see – it was not love, the bird of paradise – who landed on Orlando's shoulder, but lust the vulture" (pg. 58). Woolf describes lust as a vulture as it was ultimately the undoing of the relationship. Vita's deep desire for Violet meant that she only really knew her for her outward beauty the exotic escapism she offered and never knew the 'real' complex Violet. In the novel and play, Violet is portrayed as Princess Sasha, whom Orlando first sees skating across the ice during the big frost. To Orlando, Sasha is an exquisite young woman who he describes as "Melon, pineapple, olive tree, emerald, fox in the snow..." (Pg. 25). Orlando's description of Sasha as many different beautiful things shows that Orlando is in awe of Sasha's outward beauty but does not know who Sasha is at her core, just as Vita never fully knew Violet. When their relationship ended, Vita accused Violet of 'cheating' on her with her husband who Violet had previously vowed never to sleep with. In the novel and play, Sasha is seen sitting on the knee of a Russian sailor just before she sails away, leaving Orlando heartbroken. Orlando's heartbreak over Sasha is signposted when he first spots her on the ice and a feeling of despair is awakened.

The affair was a sexual awakening for Vita, who during the relationship began cross-dressing and developing her male alter ego, Julian. Following the affair, Vita's style of dress became androgynous; donning an outfit consisting of breeches and leather gaiters. This is what Woolf described as Vita's 'epiphany' after her relationship with Violet, as she had discovered a new sense of self (Smith, 2006). In the novel and play, Vita's 'epiphany' is shown when Orlando falls asleep after Sasha leaves, then later when he wakes as a woman. Further analysis of gender in *Orlando* can be found in the following pages.



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RENEE MULDER!

CHARACTERS (CONT).

MARMADUKE BONTHROP SHELMERDINE, ESQUIRE

(Harold Nicholson, Vita's husband)

Harold Nicholson married Vita Sackville-West in 1913. When he contracted a venereal disease several years later, Harold's homosexuality came to light. Vita and Harold continued a comfortable and open marriage until the day they died, both having same-sex relationships with other people. Harold is represented in Orlando as Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire. Vita affectionately called Harold 'Mar' one of the names Orlando also nicknames Marmaduke.

Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine Esquire's long name implies the many facets of Harold's personality and lifestyle choices. Harold's homosexuality and willingness to participate in an open marriage encouraged Vita to explore her own identity. Marmaduke offers Orlando the same freedom. This is the result of Orlando discovering that Marmaduke's identity is multifaceted with qualities of both the male and female gender.

Despite the conservative English society of the early twentieth century, Vita's open marriage with Harold afforded her the freedom to explore her identity, including through homosexual relationships and cross-dressing. Vita's exploration was protected under the guise of her marriage to Harold, which aligned to the expectations of British society. Similarly, in the play, Orlando marries Shel which allows her to conform with the spirit of the 19th century. However, Shel is more than a husband to Orlando (as Harold was to Vita), as he is not defined by gender or societal expectations but is made up of positive qualities usually ascribed to either male or female genders.

ARCHDUCHESS HARRIET/ ARCHDUKE HARRY

(Lord Henry Lascelles, a suitor of Vita's)

Archduchess Harriet first appears towards the middle of the play. In STC's production the Archduchess is represented by a male actor (John Gaden) dressed as a woman. The Archduchess is an over-the-top, ridiculous character and is intended to be a parody of a lover who would be found in a romance novel (Sparknotes, 2015). This sentiment is echoed in Orlando's line to the audience, "If this is love, there is something highly ridiculous about it" (pg.81), The Archduchess is constantly giggling and saying "tee-hee" and "haw-haw" when speaking to Orlando, which emphasises her absurdity. Despite this, Orlando feels the "vulture of lust" alighting on his shoulder when he is with the Archduchess and, recognising its dangers from his romance with Princess Sasha, requests to be sent to Constantinople and away from the Archduchess. However, the Archduchess reappears, transforming to a man by taking off her clothes to reveal the clothes of a gentleman underneath.

The character of the Archduchess/Archduke represents Vita's experience of a suitor named Lord Henry Lascelles. Vita has a short courtship with Henry, but she found him to be haughty and boring. In the play, Orlando says: 'I bet you five hundred pounds that the fly will settle on my lump of sugar rather than on yours' to which the Archduke responds "That's a delightful game...my darling. I bet you five hundred pounds" (pg. 85). Orlando cheats in the game, which is seen as an unacceptable crime to the Archduke and results in their courtship ending.

Archduchess Harriet also changes gender to be Archduke Harry and meets Orlando again when she has turned into a man. In the production this occurs when the actor Garth Holcombe, dressed as the Archduchess, appears at the top of the stairs, throws off his feathered female cloak to reveal a masculine pant-suit underneath. The Archduchess's gender change is used to contrast Orlando's gender change. The Duchess's gender change can be considered a dishonest and selfish change, as it happens because the Duchess is determined to snare Orlando. Whereas, Orlando's change is an honest, truthful change that occurs for Orlando to fulfil her search for her true identity.

CHARACTERS (CONT.)

THE CHORUS (The Narrators)

The chorus in Orlando have two main functions in the play. They are the narrators of the story and transform into various characters in the play. The narrators in a sense are the voice of Virginia Woolf as the biographer and Sarah Ruhl who has now brought the story to life on stage. The narration by the chorus is directed out to the audience which positions the audience outside the action; bystanders to the world of the play and slightly emotionally detached from the dramatic action. This positioning allows the audience to reflect on the world of the play. In particular the ridiculousness of life, time, gender and cultural codes. These ideas are reinforced by Orlando who uses direct address to communicate her opinions on his/her current situation. For example, in the 17th Century Orlando is forced into a life of banality as a woman by doing nothing but sipping tea all day. Orlando reacts to this by saying to the audience “What’s the good of being a fine young woman in the prime of life if I have to pass all my mornings watching flies with an Archduke?” (pg. 85)

The narration swiftly changes from first person to third person throughout the play. Some words or phrases are said in unison and others are repeated. These vocal dynamics add to the poetic and playful atmosphere of the play.

The chorus also transform into other characters in the play who Orlando meets on his/her journey through time. The chorus are dressed in everyday clothes including jeans, shirts and t-shirts. This choice in costume gives the audience a sense that the chorus exist in the present time and are re-telling Orlando’s story like folklore. When not involved in the action, the chorus stand on either side of the stage watching the events of Orlando’s life unfold.

The multiple roles played by the chorus are signified through a change in costume or a prop. For example, Favilla, Clorinda and Euphrosyne are created through floral headpieces and the sailor on the Russian ship is signified by Anthony Taufa holding a rope.

THE HOUSE IN THE COUNTRY (Knole House, Vita’s family home)

Throughout the play, Orlando frequently returns to a house in the country. This house is inspired by Vita Sackville-West’s family home – Knole House, which is one of the largest country houses in England. The house had been in the Sackville family since the 1600s and today is looked after by the British National Trust. The house is often referred to as the ‘calendar house’ as it has 365 rooms, 54 staircases, 12 entrances and 7 courtyards (Court Theatre, 2010).

Due to the law of primogeniture, Vita was never able to inherit the family home. The law of primogeniture dictates that the first born male child inherits the family estate. Vita was an only child and upon her father’s death, Knole House was inherited by her Uncle Charles who then became the 4th Lord Sackville.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

SARAH RUHL - NARRATIVE AND FEMINISM

Sarah Ruhl is a contemporary American playwright. She has been described as “one of the most important American playwrights working today” (Durham, 2013). This is because Ruhl’s plays have a unique aesthetic while also exploring varied topics, such as bereavement in *The Clean House* and the history of female sexuality in *In the Next Room*. Having studied at Yale under prominent feminist playwright Paula Vogel, Ruhl’s narratives tend to navigate the journey of a female protagonist and explore feminist ideas.

Ruhl’s style is an ideal match for Woolf’s *Orlando*, as “feminist writers reject a linear, forward-moving action in favour of contiguity, or a series of scenes in continuous connection” (Barranger, 2004, pg. 533). Often, feminist writing subvert conventional structures. Instead, a woman’s experience is “...rather disjointed, broken, and disconnected without clear lines of development” (Barranger, 2004, pg. 533). Furthermore, “...women’s lives are in themselves fragmented; their experience of time and relationships is one of constant interruption” (Barranger, 2004, pg. 355). In Ruhl’s adaptation of *Orlando*, the narrative is similarly fragmented with Orlando’s experience of time and relationships disrupted and fragmented over the course of 300 years with his/her engagement in a myriad of relationships and circumstances.

Her writing is described in the New York Times by Charles Isherwood. “As a storyteller, Ruhl marches to Ovid’s drum rather than Aristotle’s. “Aristotle has held sway for many centuries, but I feel our culture is hungry for Ovid’s way of telling stories,” she said, describing Ovid’s narrative strategy as “one thing transforming into another.” She went on, “His is not the neat Aristotelian arc but, instead, small transformations that are delightful and tragic.” (Isherwood, 2010).



Jacqueline McKenzie and Luisa Hastings Edge in rehearsal for STC’s *Orlando*, 2015. Image: Hon Boey. ©

STYLE

Virginia Woolf's aim in creating a new biography with *Orlando* was to express the person's inner-life and personality as opposed to just facts, having firmly believed that one's identity is composed of many selves (Hoffman, 1968). This was not only achieved through the story of Orlando but the many different styles the play encompasses. *Orlando* is a biography, a poem, historical fiction, magical realism, contemporary theatre, roman-a-clef, a love letter, a fantastical escapade, a fabulation and a fairytale-a-clef. Playwright Sarah Ruhl and director Sarah Goodes, have honoured these genres by bringing them to life on stage creating a play that has been described as a "gender bending, genre bender" (Court Theatre, 2010).

The consistently changing styles represent Orlando's fluid gender identity and journey as a character. Just as Orlando changes from era to era so too do the dramatic styles of the play. And just as Orlando has many different selves, so too does the play have many different dramatic conventions. The fluidity of Orlando's gender and the play's style creates a whimsical and playful atmosphere where the audience feel as though they drift through Orlando's journey (the concept of 'drifting' is perhaps cleverly symbolised in the motif of the ship mentioned throughout the play.)

Historical Fiction

Notable people and events from history are featured in a fictional context.

Magical Realism

A fictional story that integrates elements of magic and fantasy through events and characters. In Magical Realism the rules of the real world are broken.

Fabulation/Fantasy

Similar to Magical Realism and featuring elements of fables with supernatural and magical themes.

Fairytale-a-cléf

Characters and events akin to fairytales appear in a text under a new context or circumstance.

Roman-a-cléf

Real people appear in a text with invented names or when a novel is about real life and features fictional elements.

A love letter

Virginia Woolf wrote *Orlando* after her own relationship with Vita ended, making the novel a kind of dedication to Vita and a tribute of Woolf's love for her.

TAKE YOUR CUE

- Outline how each of the above styles are featured in *Orlando*.
- What adjectives would you use to describe the narrative and characters in *Orlando*? Why?
- Are there any other styles that you would use to describe Sarah Ruhl's adaptation and Sarah Goodes' direction?
- If the novel and then the play adaptation had been written as a realistic biography featuring only facts, works and events of Vita's life, how would the audience's understanding of Vita be different?

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

CHARACTER

Characterisation is the process of developing from a role to build a complex personality and background for a particular character. Intention, status and attitude are integral ingredients for a character's motivation and belief. Complexity in character can be developed through interaction and relationship with others.

TENSION

Tension is the force which drives all drama. It creates a powerful and complex form of energy on stage which, in turn, generates a level of excitement in the audience. Tension strengthens audience engagement as it motivates the audience to continue watching while influencing them to question the ideas in the play

TIME AND PLACE

All dramatic action occurs at a time and place. Different settings dictate other characters that might be introduced, certain settings will intensify the action, multiple locations can enable us to explore many aspects of the situation, while the use of contrasting settings can help build the dramatic tension.

TAKE YOUR CUE

- ◇ How do the attitudes and beliefs of Orlando change across the course of the play? What influences this?
- ◇ When Orlando changes from a man to a woman, does Jacqueline McKenzie change her voice or movement? What is the reason for this?
- ◇ Do you consider the Chorus to be characters? Why?
- ◇ What performance skills do the Chorus use in the performance of their role as narrators?
- ◇ How does multiple role and actors playing characters of a different gender to their own impact on your interpretation of the play?

TAKE YOUR CUE

- ◇ How would you describe tension in the narrative of *Orlando*? Does it operate in the conventional sense with tension being established, made more complex and then resolved?
- ◇ How do the different centuries influence the tension that Orlando faces? What message is Virginia Woolf trying to communicate in this?
- ◇ Do you as audience members feel a connection to Orlando and his/her journey? How? Why?

TAKE YOUR CUE

- ◇ How is the change in place and time communicated to the audience through the various production elements?
- ◇ Why is time important to Orlando's journey as a man who becomes a woman?
- ◇ The play is set in England where Vita Sackville-West was born and lived. How does England as a country and society and how England changes through time impact on Orlando's journey?
- ◇ Why do Queen Elizabeth and Sasha meet Orlando again in the final scene?

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA (CONT).

ATMOSPHERE

Atmosphere is the feeling or mood that is created by, and emerges through, dramatic action. It is closely linked with tension: as the tension in a drama builds so too does the mood and this strengthens the tension. Drama appeals to the senses to evoke the atmosphere and the emotions to intensify the mood.

DRAMATIC MEANING

Dramatic Meaning is created through the manipulation of the elements of drama which are interrelated and interdependent. Dramatic Meaning is what is communicated between the performers and the audience to create an actor-audience relationship.



CHECK OUT OUR PRE-SHOW IN-THE-KNOW FACT SHEET FOR ALL THE ESSENTIAL INFORMATION PRIOR TO THE SHOW!

TAKE YOUR CUE

- ◇ What adjectives would you use to describe the atmosphere of the play?
- ◇ How would you describe the soundscape used in the play? How did the sound along with the revolving mirrored set work together to create atmosphere?
- ◇ What was the purpose of song in the production?

TAKE YOUR CUE

- ◇ Read the Themes and Ideas section of this On Cue. Devise what you believe to be the Dramatic Meaning of *Orlando*.
- ◇ *Orlando* is a biography written in a magical and fantastical style. What message did Virginia Woolf want communicated about Vita? What message about Vita do Sarah Ruhl (Playwright) and Sarah Goodes (Director) communicate through the magical and fantastical staging of the production?

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OTHER RESOURCES

- Designer Sketchbook with sketches from Renee Mulder's costume designs
- Pre-Show In-the-Know handout for fast facts and what to look for in the performance.
- Classroom poster and handout of the article *The Taboo of Sadness* by Finnegan Kruckemeyer