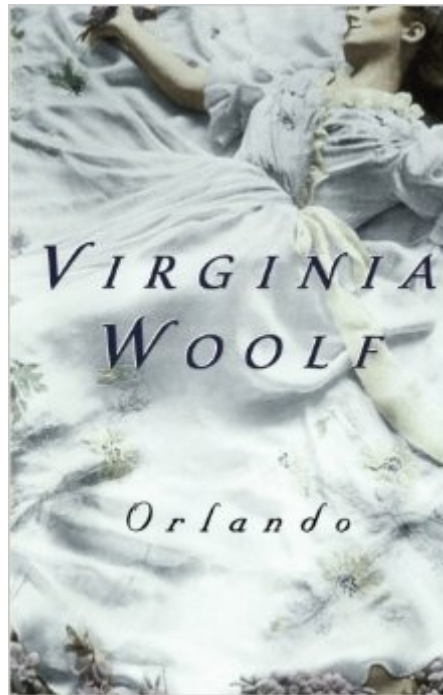


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Orlando: A Biography



Synopsis

In her most exuberant, most fanciful novel, Woolf has created a character liberated from the restraints of time and sex. Born in the Elizabethan Age to wealth and position, Orlando is a young nobleman at the beginning of the story-and a modern woman three centuries later. "A poetic masterpiece of the first rank"; (Rebecca West). The source of a critically acclaimed 1993 feature film directed by Sally Potter. Index; illustrations.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars See all reviews (137 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

"Orlando" is a fictional biography whose subject in the beginning is a sixteen-year-old boy in the Elizabethan era and in the end -- three hundred years later -- is a thirty-six-year-old woman. This is not a novel about transsexuality, as such a premise would indicate, but it is a statement about sexual identity and gender roles in English society as only an author like Virginia Woolf could make, territory not even the brazen D.H. Lawrence could traverse with much confidence. It is a lyrical tour de force in which Woolf displays her considerable talent for subtly describing moods and scenery, but most surprisingly, it demonstrates her sly sense of humor and satire. Orlando's gender alteration is naturally the central event of his preternaturally long life, but his aging only twenty years over a course of three centuries is certainly no less bizarre. To describe the circumstances under which he becomes a woman or explain the logic by which he ages so slowly would be giving away too much in this review, nor would it really help to recommend the novel to one who is not yet persuaded to

read it, so I will be silent on that account, saying only that these outrageous devices fully succeed as vehicles to explore Woolf's theme of femininity with respect to English cultural and historical frames of reference. The novel examines the effect of gender alteration on Orlando's amorous and professional capacities. As a young nobleman in the Elizabethan court whose interests are swordsmanship and poetry, he is engaged to an aristocratic Irish girl, has a torrid affair with a Russian princess, and meets a silly woman who, resembling nothing so much as a hare, calls herself the Archduchess Harriet.

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