

*Same person.  
No difference at  
all....*

*Explorations of Gender in film  
CUFA Film Club Week 5*



# One must live for one's self

Like other aspects of one's identity, gender is filled with complexity and nuance. However, these complexities are often overlooked or discarded in favour of broad stereotypes, which reduce the experiences of people to a limited binary.

This binary is reflected in movies from early cinema to the present day, characters are often limited to certain traits, abilities, or story arcs depending on their gender (gender often being reduced to male/female, with no inclusion of nonbinary or genderfluid perspectives of gender and identity).

However, despite this overarching trend, there are still movies which explore or blur these binaries. This is most often accomplished with a person of one gender dressing up as or disguising as another, as seen in *Tentl* (1983) or *Some Like it Hot* (1959). In these films, the disguised individual is exposed to an entirely different gendered experience, and often encounters some conflict over their gender identity or sexuality as a result.

Nevertheless, there are films which explore the blurring of these binaries, whether that be through comedy or drama, films which are largely influenced by the conversations (or lack thereof) surrounding gender at the time of their release. Overall, the films in this week's series explore the many nuances, struggles, and joys that come with challenging notions of gender identity and expression.

Now on to the featured movies! 

# Hamlet

Year Released: 1922

Directed by: Svend Gade and Heinz Schall.

Country of Origin: Germany

Available on: YouTube (<https://youtu.be/GtxnYHLeMlc>)

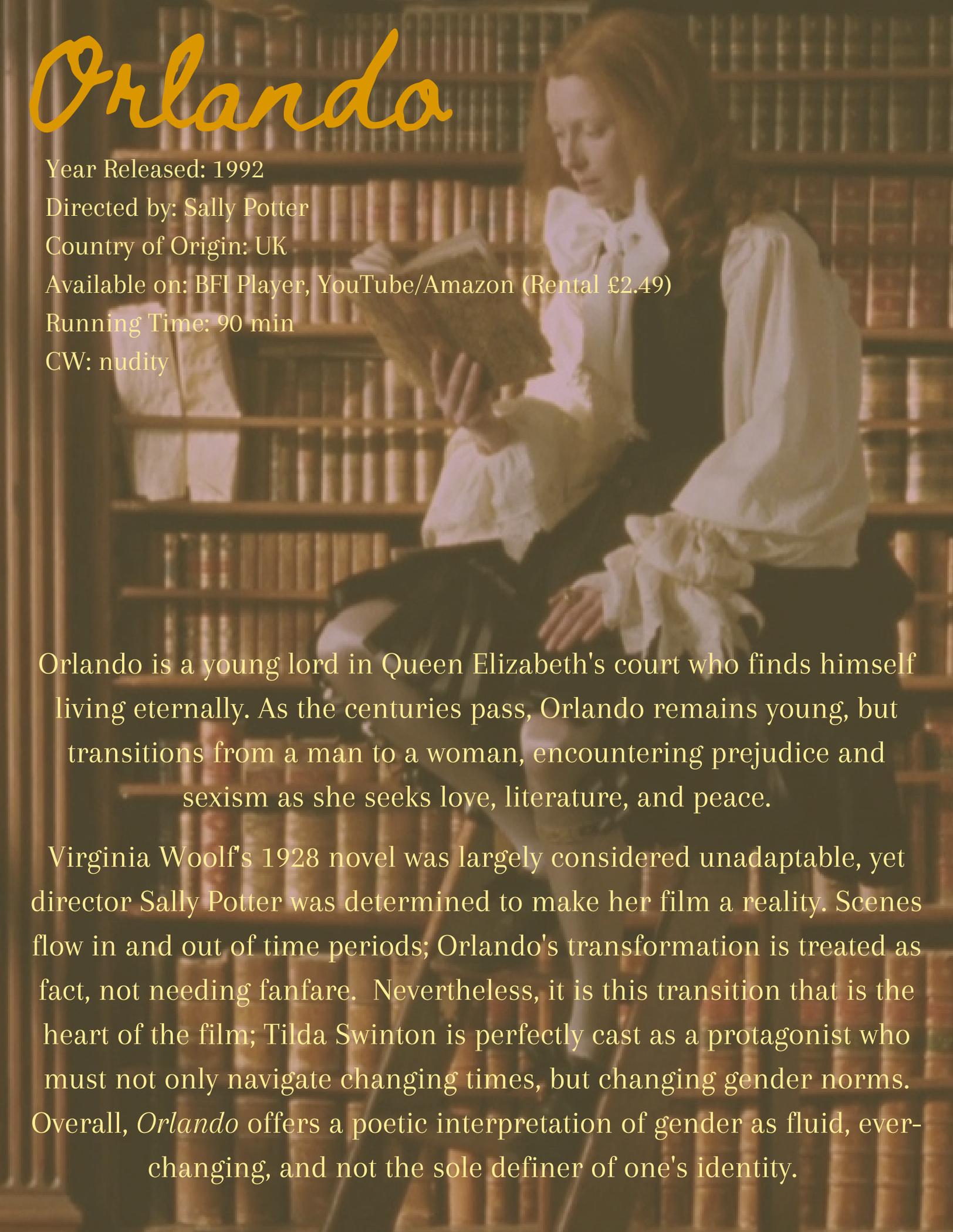
Running Time: 111 min

CW:

Queen Gertrude of Denmark decides to raise her newborn daughter as a boy - Hamlet. Years later, Hamlet's father is murdered; amidst his/her quest for revenge Hamlet becomes entangled in a love triangle between themselves, Ophelia, and Horatio.

Silent films have an unfortunate reputation of being boring; this reimagining of Shakespeare's seminal play proves the opposite. The dynamic of a woman raised as a man navigating the attractions of both men and women is an intriguing concept. By emphasising the friendship between Horatio and Hamlet, the film also speaks to modern analysis of the original play's homoeroticism. Asta Nielsen shines in the titular role with her expressive makeup and eerie scenes of madness. While the film ultimately returns its characters to the cis, heterosexual roles they must occupy in society, the journey to that conclusion is nonetheless fascinating.

# Orlando

A woman with long reddish-brown hair, wearing a white ruffled blouse and a dark vest, is sitting on a wooden chair in a library. She is holding an open book and looking down at it. The background is filled with bookshelves containing many books. The lighting is warm and soft.

Year Released: 1992

Directed by: Sally Potter

Country of Origin: UK

Available on: BFI Player, YouTube/Amazon (Rental £2.49)

Running Time: 90 min

CW: nudity

Orlando is a young lord in Queen Elizabeth's court who finds himself living eternally. As the centuries pass, Orlando remains young, but transitions from a man to a woman, encountering prejudice and sexism as she seeks love, literature, and peace.

Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel was largely considered unadaptable, yet director Sally Potter was determined to make her film a reality. Scenes flow in and out of time periods; Orlando's transformation is treated as fact, not needing fanfare. Nevertheless, it is this transition that is the heart of the film; Tilda Swinton is perfectly cast as a protagonist who must not only navigate changing times, but changing gender norms. Overall, *Orlando* offers a poetic interpretation of gender as fluid, ever-changing, and not the sole definer of one's identity.

# Some Like it Hot

Year Released: 1959

Directed by: Billy Wilder

Country of Origin: USA

Available on: Amazon (Rental £2.49)

Running Time: 122 min

CW: mild violence

After witnessing a mafia-related massacre, musicians Joe and Jerry go into hiding. Their plan to evade the mafia? Masquerade as women and join an all-female band performing in Florida. Humour, mayhem, and romance ensue in this comedy classic.

While on the surface *Some Like it Hot* might seem doomed to be filled with stereotyping, there is more to this film than meets the eye. To be sure, there are the scenes where the male protagonists express glee at how their disguises grant easy access to women, particularly Sugar Kane (Marilyn Monroe), but there are also nuances surrounding sexuality and gender. One character falls in love with another man and embraces femininity, while another struggles to assert his masculinity as he must constantly remain in disguise. *Some Like it Hot* remains a comedic gem filled with interesting reflections on gender identity.

# More Stuff!

## Other films to check out:

Queen Christina (USA, 1933)

Funeral Parade of Roses (Japan, 1969)

A Slightly Pregnant Man (France, 1973)

Lady Oscar (France, 1979)

Paris is Burning (USA, 1990)

Victor/Victoria (UK/USA, 1982)

Yentl (USA, 1983)

## Other Articles to Read:

Nearly Three Decades Later, Sally Potter's Orlando Is More Topical Than Ever:  
<https://www.vogue.com/article/sally-potter-s-1992-orlando-movie-with-tilda-swinton-stands-the-test-of-time>

In Praise of the Artifice in George Cukor's Sylvia Scarlett:  
<https://www.popmatters.com/george-cukor-sylvia-scarlett-2648380050.html>

Some Like It Hot Is a Perfect Comedy to Get Lost In on a Friday Night:  
<https://www.vulture.com/2020/03/some-like-it-hot-is-a-perfect-comedy-to-get-lost-in-tonight.html>