



ORLANDO

Adapted by Sarah Ruhl
Based on the Novel by Virginia Woolf

Directed by Jessica Thebus

March 10 – April 10, 2011

at Court Theatre

CHARACTERS

- Orlando
- Sasha
- Four Chorus Members

STORY

Orlando, based on the novel by Virginia Woolf, spans over 300 years, during which time the protagonist, Orlando, ages only thirty-six years, and changes gender from a man to a woman.

At the outset, Orlando, a young noble boy, meets Queen Elizabeth and is brought to her court to become a Steward, Treasurer, and her lover, giving him all the wealth and status he could want. But when she sees Orlando kissing a young girl, she is infuriated.

For a while, Orlando takes to spending time with people of a "low kind." He frequents pubs and has his way with many young women. When he grows tired of this lifestyle, he heads back to the Court, this time under King James I (Queen Elizabeth has died). This is the winter of the Great Frost, and King James has turned the frozen river into a carnival scene. One night on the river, Orlando sees a figure skate past him. He is not sure whether it is a man or a woman, but he is incredibly attracted to it. It turns out to be the Russian princess, Sasha. Because Orlando speaks fluent French, he is the only one who can converse with her. They grow very close, become lovers, and plan to run away together, but on the night they are to leave, Sasha never arrives. Orlando rides to the river to find that the frost has broken; hundreds of people are stranded on icebergs and he watches as the Russian ship drifts away.

Heartbroken, Orlando closes himself up inside his house with 365 rooms and fifty-two staircases. He decides that he will concentrate all his efforts on writing. He invites Nick Greene, a famous poet, to his house, and although Nick is entertaining, their difference in class is clearly a great barrier between them. When Nick returns home, he writes a parody of Orlando, a rich nobleman closed up inside his house. Orlando is once again heartbroken and he burns all his poems and dramas save one, a poem entitled "The Oak Tree." Orlando decides to refurnish every room in his home; after this is done, he invites all the neighbors in, earning their respect. One afternoon, he sees a figure on horseback in his courtyard. It is an extremely tall woman, the Archduchess Harriet of Romania. Orlando is repulsed by her advances toward him. He decides to leave England immediately. King Charles II sends Orlando to Constantinople as an



ambassador. One morning, his servants find him alone in his room, in a trance, unable to be awakened; after seven days, Orlando awakens from his trance as a woman.

On a ship voyage back to England, Orlando becomes romantic with the ship's Captain, Nicholas. Finally she feels what it is like to be a woman, and she cannot decide which gender she enjoys more. On returning to England, Orlando meets Archduchess Harriet again, but she finds out that he is really a man, Archduke Harry. He proposes to Orlando, but she finds him too slow and boring to marry. As Orlando makes a life for herself in London, the eighteenth century ends and the nineteenth century begins.

The Victorian era is gloomy; no sunlight gets in and all the vegetation is overgrown. Orlando feels pressure to yield to "the spirit of the age" and find a husband. She goes out and thinks herself nature's bride, a woman married to the moor. She falls and twists her ankle and a man rides up to rescue her. Within two minutes, they know everything about each other, and know they are meant to be together. Orlando cannot believe that Shel has all the good qualities of a woman, and Shel cannot believe that Orlando has all the good qualities of a man. But Shel is a seaman, and when the wind changes, he must leave to do his duty on his ship. Before he goes, he marries Orlando in a hasty but romantic ceremony. Orlando finally finishes the manuscript of her poem, "The Oak Tree," and she travels to London. It is now 1901, and as King Edward VII succeeds Queen Victoria on the throne, the world becomes much brighter, if more desperate. As the play comes to a close and her husband returns, Orlando, now a woman, and now 36, must come to terms with not only her past, but also a present that frightens her.

Virginia Woolf

FROM THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY

Woolf [NÉE Stephen], (Adeline) Virginia (1882–1941), writer and publisher, was born Adeline Virginia Stephen on 25 January 1882 at 22 Hyde Park Gate, London. She was the third child of Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), a London man of letters and founding editor of the *DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY*, and his second wife, Julia Prinsep Duckworth, NÉE Jackson (1846–1895).

It was decided at an early age that Virginia was to be a writer. Writing absorbed her, she said, 'ever since I was a little creature, scribbling a story in the manner of Hawthorne on the green plush sofa in the drawing room at St. Ives [the family summer home] while the grownups dined' (V. Woolf, *Diary*, 19 Dec 1938). Virginia's bookishness drew her closer to her father than his other children were. Her mother caught her, at nine, twisting a lock of her hair as she read, in imitation of Leslie Stephen. Virginia's mother died unexpectedly, at forty-nine, on 5 May 1895. Later, Virginia pictured herself as she was at that time: an 'emergent creature struck by successive blows as she sat with wings still creased on the broken chrysalis'.

Leslie Stephen shaped Virginia's tastes, especially for biography. She picked up his reverential glow balanced by humor. He taught her to pit observed truth against established paradigms, and that if writing is to last it must have, for its backbone, some fierce attachment to an idea. But his deepest influence on his



Virginia Woolf in 1902 (age 20), by George Charles Beresford

daughter's writing may lie in his unorthodox tramps. Virginia, too, was a walker. As though she were tracking a metaphor for her future work, she followed a natural path which ignored artificial boundaries.

After her father's death in 1904 Virginia—together with siblings Vanessa, Thoby, and Adrian—left the solid red brick of Kensington for the superb fadedness of Bloomsbury. At home Virginia Stephen played up to the family's caricature of her as mad genius and helpless, scatty dependant of her sister. Yet she was professional and direct as a teacher from 1905 to 1907 at Morley College, a night school for workers in south London. As a writer, too, Virginia Stephen showed herself self-disciplined, professional, prolific, and courageous. She examined the hidden moments and obscure formative experiences in a life, rather than its more public actions.

In Gordon Square the two Stephen sisters brought together a group of innovative men whom Thoby had known in Cambridge: Leonard Woolf (1880–1969), a stubborn, passionate man, alert to the ills of society and with the practical sense to combat them; the biographer Lytton Strachey; the art critic Clive Bell; the artists Roger Fry and Duncan Grant; the novelist E. M. Forster; and the economist John Maynard Keynes. The shock of Thoby's death in 1906 sealed his sisters' ties to his friends. Vanessa married Clive Bell in 1907, and the Stephens' Thursday evenings continued at 29 Fitzroy Square, where Virginia and Adrian set up a separate home. This proved the beginning of the Bloomsbury group. Bloomsbury abjured the chattiness of society for speculative silence; granted agency to women; welcomed sexual freedom and homosexuality; and generally ridiculed the social, religious, and moral orthodoxies of the Victorians.

Virginia, at thirty, married Leonard Woolf on 10 August 1912 in St Pancras town hall. The adjustment to marriage, as well as fears for the publication of *THE VOYAGE OUT*, were the background to Virginia Woolf's breakdowns in 1913 and 1915. In 1915 Miss Thomas, director of Burley, announced that Virginia's mind was 'played out' and persuaded her family that her character had permanently deteriorated. But the doctors and nurses who believed there could be no full recovery were wrong. By November 1915 she was 'sane'. The twenty dark years were over, and the fertile stretch of her life began.

From 1915 until 1924 the Woolfs lived quietly at Hogarth House, Richmond. There, in 1917, they set up the Hogarth Press, at first as a hobby and with a view to publishing their own work. Soon, though, the Hogarth Press became a publishing phenomenon, putting out some of the most advanced writing of the day, including works by T. S. Eliot, Katherine Mansfield, E. M. Forster, Maynard Keynes, Gorki, Freud, Robert Graves, Edith Sitwell, and of course the Woolfs themselves. At the time the press was established Virginia Woolf was writing her second novel, *NIGHT AND DAY*.

From 1919 Virginia Woolf shaped the modern novel. She rejected the narrative coherence of Victorian fiction in favour of 'an ordinary mind on an ordinary day', often several minds. Her aim was to find in the 'moment of being' a climactic inward event, parallel to what her friend T. S. Eliot termed 'unattended moments' and what James Joyce termed 'epiphany'. Woolf and Eliot wished to cut through the voluminousness of nineteenth-century writing in order to identify 'the moment of importance'. Both wished to cross the frontiers of consciousness where words fail. The Victorians had trusted language to say just what they meant; the moderns found this impossible, and therefore communicated through symbols—the lighthouse or the waves—which require a reciprocal effort on the part of the reader. Virginia Woolf therefore gave fiction the depth of poetry.

Virginia Woolf entered the political arena with *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN* (1929). The aim was to establish a woman's tradition, recognizable through its distinct problems: the age-old confinement of women to the domestic sphere, the pressures of conformity to patriarchal ideas, and worst, the denial of income and privacy ('a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write'). Virginia Woolf wanted to retrieve rather than discard the traditions of womanhood. It suggested that women excluded from historical record were the true makers of England as they passed their unnoticed code of preservation from mother to daughter, cultivating domestic order and the arts of peace, as opposed to militarized thugs who repeatedly destroyed it. Where the 'woman question' in the nineteenth century was concerned largely with issues of the vote and education, Virginia Woolf became the leading spokeswoman for the

dominant issue of the twentieth century: professional advance. Her support for the advancement of women co-existed with her readiness to love women. It was flirtatious rather than physical, and she remained evasive and ambivalent about her sexual identity, but she adored, romanced, mythologized, and wished to be petted by women, in particular the writer and gardener Vita Sackville-West, where romance, from December 1925, was bound up with the amusement Virginia Woolf found in the aristocracy. According to Vita, they made love only twice, despite many opportunities. *ORLANDO: A BIOGRAPHY* (1928) celebrates Vita as a man-woman, switching gender to endorse the androgynous creative mind through the ages.



Vita Sackville-West

Vita Sackville-West

FROM THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY

West, Victoria Mary [Vita] Sackville- (1892–1962), writer and gardener, was born on 9 March 1892 at Knole near Sevenoaks, Kent, the only child of Lionel Edward Sackville-West (1867–1928), and his wife and first cousin, Victoria Josefa Dolores Catalina Sackville-West (1862–1936), society hostess, the illegitimate daughter of Sir Lionel Sackville Sackville-West, second Baron Sackville (1827–1908), and the Spanish dancer Josefa de la Oliva (NÉE Durán y Ortega, known as Pepita). Her father succeeded her grandfather as third Baron Sackville in 1908. She was known throughout her life as Vita. Her upbringing, both privileged and solitary, was shaped above all by the romantic atmosphere and associations of Knole, the sprawling Tudor palace set in a spacious park in Kent, where she spent her childhood. Her literary taste and temperament were created substantially by this aristocratic and historical backcloth and intensified both by the colourful and eccentric personality of her mother and by the gradual realization, with which she never entirely came to terms, that as a woman she could never inherit the Knole estate. Until she was thirteen she was educated by governesses at home before moving to Miss Woolff's day school in London, but her voracious reading in literature and history made her essentially an autodidact.

Sackville-West was also exposed to French culture from an early age through her mother's friendship with Sir John Murray Scott, ultimate residuary legatee of the art collector Sir Richard Wallace and owner of the Château de Bagatelle in Paris. Before the First World War she also enjoyed the opportunity to travel to Italy, Russia, Poland, Austria, and Spain. Throughout her life these cosmopolitan early years (which left the residue of fluency in Italian and French) were juxtaposed, and not without tension, with a deep sense of rootedness within the Kent countryside. She began to write at an early age and completed eight historical novels, five plays, and a number of

poems before she was eighteen. She privately published a verse drama about the poet Thomas Chatterton in 1909.

However, continual shadows played across her youth in both direct and indirect forms. Most publicly there were two lawsuits that threatened the security and reputation of her family: in the first her mother's relatives tried to prevent her father's inheritance of Knole, and in the second, where Vita was one of the major witnesses, the relatives of Sir John Murray Scott tried to overturn his large bequest to Lady Sackville on grounds of undue influence. Both were successfully overcome, but they took their toll on her parents' marriage. These events, combined with her mother's increasingly manipulative and emotionally quixotic behaviour, made the outwardly dominant and self-confident Sackville-West more diffident and uncertain.

On 1 October 1913, despite conducting love affairs with women, Sackville-West married Harold George Nicolson (1886–1968), son of Sir Arthur Nicolson (later Lord Carnock), at Knole. Sackville-West retained her maiden name. Nicolson was at this stage in his career a junior diplomat, and they began their married life in Constantinople, where he was currently posted. They returned to Britain in 1914 and their first son, Lionel Benedict Nicolson, was born in August that year. They lived both in London and at Long Barn, a house near Knole, which served as their country home between 1915 and 1930, where Vita wrote most of her early books and developed her first garden. A second son was stillborn in 1915, and their last child, Nigel Nicolson, was born in London in 1917. These years were crucial in three respects—for the emergence across a range of genres of her professional literary persona; for the full exploration of her sexual and emotional identity (what she called her dual nature); and perhaps above all for the maturation of an unconventional but harmonious marriage.

Sackville-West, who signed all her books V. Sackville-West, published *POEMS OF EAST AND WEST* in 1917, a collection of lyric poems composed while she was in Constantinople. In *HERITAGE* (1919), her first novel, she explored her own history through metaphors of genetic determinism, and in *THE HEIR* (1922) she vented her feelings about Knole. *KNOLE AND THE SACKVILLES* (1922), a historical work, found a large audience which continued once public access to stately homes began to increase. In the years immediately after the First World War Sackville-West became committed to a stormy and nearly self-destructive love affair with her schoolfriend Violet Trefusis (1894–1972), daughter of Mrs Alice Keppel, mistress of King Edward VII. The lovers travelled around Europe with Sackville-West occasionally cross-dressed as a fictive persona, Julian. They collaborated on a novel, *CHALLENGE* (1923), that was published in America under Sackville-West's name but suppressed in Britain. It is dedicated to Violet and is about their relationship. Sackville-West very nearly left her husband altogether. However, this crisis in fact proved eventually to be

In Memoriam: Virginia Woolf

BY VITA SACKVILLE-WEST,
PUBLISHED SHORTLY AFTER VIRGINIA'S DEATH

Many words crowd, and all and each unmeaning.
The simplest words in sorrow are the best.

So let us say, she loved the water-meadows,
The Downs; her friends; her books; her memories;
The room which was her own.
London by twilight; shops and Mrs. Brown;

Donne's church; the Strand; the buses, and the large
Smell of humanity that passed her by.

I remember she told me once that she, a child,
Trapped evening moths with honey round a tree-trunk,
And with a lantern watched their antic flight.
So she, a poet, caught her special prey
With words of honey and lamp of wit.

Frugal, austere, fine, proud,
Rich on her contradictions, rich in love,
So did she capture all her moth-like self:
Her fluttered spirit, delicate and soft,
Bumping against the lamp of life, too hard, too glassy,

Yet kept a sting beneath the brushing wing,
Her blame astringent and her praise supreme.

How small, how petty seemed the little men
Measured against her scornful quality.

Some say, she lived in an unreal world,
Cloud-cuckoo-land. Maybe. She now has gone
Into the prouder world of immortality.

the catalyst for Nicolson and Sackville-West to restructure their marriage satisfactorily so that they could both pursue a series of relationships through which they could fulfill their essentially homosexual identity while retaining a secure basis of companionship and affection. Sackville-West's other lovers included the journalist Evelyn Irons and Hilda Matheson, head of the BBC talks department, and she was also very close to Virginia Woolf, whom she met in December 1922. Sackville-West's *SEDUCERS IN ECUADOR* (1924) was written for Woolf. Woolf returned the favour with her historical-fantasy novel *ORLANDO* (1928), a public love letter and tribute to Sackville-West. The novel sums up with unique subtlety and perception Vita's own multifaceted and sometimes discordant personality and her androgynous sexual appeal, historical imagination, and love of Knole.

KNOLE HOUSE

Knole is an **English country house** in the town of **Sevenoaks** in west **Kent**, surrounded by a 1,000-acre (4.0 km²) deer park. One of England's largest houses, it is reputed to be a **calendar house**, having 365 rooms, 52 staircases, 12 entrances and 7 courtyards. It is remarkable in England for the degree to which its early 17th-century appearance is preserved, particularly in the case of the state rooms: the exteriors and interiors of many houses of this period, such as **Clandon Park** in Surrey, were dramatically altered later on. The surrounding **deer park** is also a remarkable survivor, having changed little over the past 400 years except for the loss of over 70% of its trees in the **Great Storm of 1987**.

The house was built by **Thomas Bouchier, Archbishop of Canterbury**, between 1456 and 1486, on the site of an earlier house belonging to **James Fiennes, the Lord Say and Sele** who was executed after the victory of **Jack Cade's** rebels at the **Battle of Solefields**. On Bouchier's death, the house was bequeathed to the **See of Canterbury** — **Sir Thomas More** appeared in revels there at the court of **John Morton** — and in subsequent years it continued to be enlarged, with the addition of a new large courtyard, now known as Green Court, and a new entrance tower. In 1538 the house was taken from Archbishop **Thomas Cranmer** by King **Henry VIII** along with **Otford Palace**.

In 1566, during the reign of Queen **Elizabeth I**, it came into the possession of her cousin **Thomas Sackville** whose descendants the **Earls and Dukes of Dorset** and **Barons Sackville** have lived there since 1603 (the intervening years saw the house let to the Lennard family). Most notably, these include writer **Vita Sackville-West** (her ***Knole and the Sackvilles***, published 1922, is regarded as a classic in the literature of English country houses); her friend and lover **Virginia Woolf** wrote the novel ***Orlando*** drawing on the history of the house and Sackville-West's ancestors. The then laws of primogeniture prevented Sackville-West herself from inheriting Knole upon the death of her father Lionel (1867-1930), the 3rd Lord Sackville, and the estate and title passed to her uncle Charles (1870-1962).

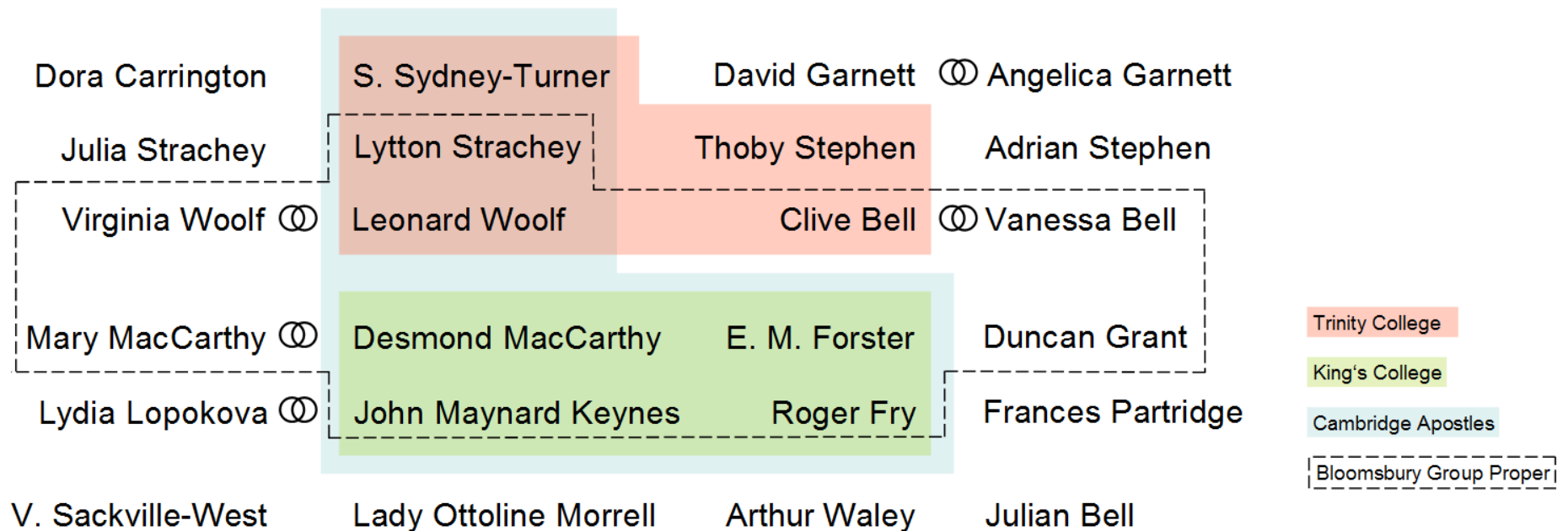


Knole House, 1880

The Bloomsbury Group

The Bloomsbury Group or Bloomsbury Set was a group of writers, intellectuals, philosophers, and artists who held informal discussions in Bloomsbury throughout the 20th century. This English collective of friends and relatives lived, worked, or studied near Bloomsbury in London during the first half of the twentieth century. Their work deeply influenced literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and sexuality. Almost everything about Bloomsbury appears to be controversial, including its membership and name. The group did not hold formal or informal discussions on particular topics, but talked about a range of topics at all times. It is now generally accepted, however, that the Group originally consisted of the novelists and essayists Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, and Mary (Molly) MacCarthy, the biographer and essayist Lytton Strachey, the economist John Maynard Keynes, the painters Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, and Roger Fry, and the critics of literature, art, and politics, Strachey, Fry, Desmond MacCarthy, Clive Bell, and Leonard Woolf.

The Bloomsbury Group (Central and Related Members)



The Dreadnaught Hoax

www.wikipedia.org

The Dreadnaught Hoax was a practical joke pulled by Horace de Vere Cole in 1910. Cole tricked the Royal Navy into showing their flagship, the warship HMS Dreadnaught, to a supposed delegation of Abyssinian royals. The hoax drew attention in Britain to the emergence of the Bloomsbury Group.

The hoax involved Cole and five friends— Virginia Stephen (later Woolf), her brother Adrian Stephen, Guy Ridley, Anthony Buxton, and artist Duncan Grant—who disguised themselves with skin darkeners and turbans. The disguise's main limitation was that the "royals" could not eat anything or their make-up would be ruined. Adrian Stephen took the role of "interpreter".

On 7 February 1910 the hoax was set in motion. Cole organized for an accomplice to send a telegram to HMS Dreadnaught which was then moored in Portland, Dorset. The message said that the ship must be prepared for the visit of a group of princes from Abyssinia and was purportedly signed by Foreign Office Under-secretary Sir Charles Hardinge.

Cole with his entourage went to London's Paddington station where Cole claimed that he was "Herbert Cholmondeley" of the UK Foreign Office and demanded a special train to Weymouth; the stationmaster arranged a VIP coach. In Weymouth, the navy welcomed the princes with an honor guard. An Abyssinian flag was not found, so the navy proceeded to use that of Zanzibar and to play Zanzibar's national anthem.

The group inspected the fleet. To show their appreciation, they communicated in gibberish drawn from Latin and Greek; they asked for prayer mats and attempted to bestow fake military honors on some of the officers. An officer familiar with both Cole and Virginia Stephen failed to recognize either.

When the prank was uncovered in London, the ringleader Horace de Vere Cole contacted the press and sent a photo of the "princes" to the *Daily Mirror*. The group's pacifist views were considered a source of embarrassment, and the Royal Navy briefly became an object of ridicule. The Navy later demanded that Cole be arrested. However, Cole and his compatriots had not broken any law. The Navy sent two officers to cane Cole as a punishment but Cole countered that it was they who should be caned because they had been fooled in the first place.

"ONCE BITTEN, TWICE SHY."

THE ABYSSINIAN PRINCES HOAX



WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT TIME SOME GENUINE EASTERN PRINCES VISIT A BRITISH MAN-O-WAR



The Dreadnaught Hoax (Virginia Woolf on far left)

Daily Mirror Cartoon covering the Dreadnaught Hoax, February 1910

LGBT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

www.wikipedia.org

Sociologist Mary Bernstein writes: "For the lesbian and gay movement, then, cultural goals include (but are not limited to) challenging dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, homophobia, and the primacy of the gendered heterosexual nuclear family (heteronormativity). Political goals include changing laws and policies in order to gain new rights, benefits, and protections from harm."^[2] Bernstein emphasizes that activists seek both types of goals in both the civil and political spheres.

As with other social movements, there is also conflict within and between LGBT movements, especially about strategies for change and debates over exactly who comprises the constituency that these movements represent. There is debate over to what extent lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered people, intersexed people, and others share common interests and a need to work together. Leaders of the lesbian and gay movement of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s often attempted to hide masculine lesbians, feminine gay men, transgendered people, and bisexuals from the public eye, creating internal divisions within LGBT communities.

LGBT movements have often adopted a kind of identity politics that sees gay, bisexual, and/or transgender people as a fixed class of people; a minority group or groups. Those using this approach aspire to liberal political goals of freedom and equal opportunity, and aim to join the political mainstream on the same level as other groups in society. In arguing that sexual orientation and gender identity are innate and cannot be consciously changed, attempts to change gay, lesbian, and bisexual people into heterosexuals ("conversion therapy") are generally opposed by the LGBT community. Such attempts are often based in religious beliefs that perceive gay, lesbian, and bisexual activity as immoral.

However, others within LGBT movements have criticised identity politics as limited and flawed, elements of the queer movement have argued that the categories of gay and lesbian are restrictive, and attempted to deconstruct those categories, which are seen to "reinforce rather than challenge a cultural system that will always mark the nonheterosexual as inferior."

GENDER IDENTITY

www.wikipedia.org

A gender identity is the way in which an individual identifies with a gender category, for example as being either female or male, or in some cases being neither. All societies have a set of gender categories that can serve as the basis of the formation of a social identity in relation to other members of society. In most societies there is a basic division between male and female genders, that are understood to be determined by biological sex, but in all societies some individuals do not identify with the gender that is otherwise associated with their biological sex. Some societies have so-called third gender categories which that can be used as a basis for a gender identity by persons who are uncomfortable with the gender that is usually associated with their sex. Although the formation of gender identity is not completely understood, many factors have been suggested as influencing its development. Biological factors that may influence gender identity include pre- and post-natal hormone levels and gene regulation. Social factors which may influence gender identity include gender messages conveyed by family, mass media, and other institutions. One's gender identity is also influenced by the social learning theory, which assumes that children develop their gender identity through observing and imitating gender-linked behaviors, and then being rewarded or punished for behaving that way. In some cases, a person's gender identity may be inconsistent with their biological sex characteristics, resulting in individuals dressing and/or behaving in a way which is perceived by others as being outside cultural gender norms; these gender expressions may be described as gender variant or transgender.

About the Playwright



Sarah Ruhl, Adaptor

Sarah Ruhl's plays include *In The Next Room (or the vibrator play)*; *The Clean House* (Pulitzer Prize finalist, 2005; Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, 2004); *Passion Play, a cycle* (Pen American Award, Fourth Freedom Forum Playwriting Award from the Kennedy Center); *Dead Man's Cell Phone* (Helen Hayes Award for Best New Play); *Melancholy Play*, *Demeter in the City* (nine NAACP Image Award nominations); *Eurydice*, *Orlando*, and *Late: a cowboy song*. Her plays have premiered at Lincoln Center Theater, the Goodman Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Second Stage, Arena Stage, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Yale Repertory Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Cornerstone Theater, Madison Repertory Theatre, and the Piven Theatre Workshop, and have been produced across the country. Her plays have also been produced internationally and translated into Polish, Russian, Spanish, Norwegian, Korean, German, and Arabic. Originally from Chicago, Ms. Ruhl received her MFA from Brown University, where she studied with Paula Vogel. In 2003, she was the recipient of the Helen Merrill Emerging Playwrights Award and the Whiting Writers' Award. She is a member of I3P and New Dramatists and won the MacArthur Fellowship in 2006. She is a recent recipient of the PEN Center Award for a mid-career playwright.

A Note about ORLANDO from Playwright Sarah Ruhl

In 1927, Virginia Woolf wrote in a letter: "Yesterday morning I was in despair... I couldn't screw a word from me; and at last dropped my head in my hands: dipped my pen in the ink, and wrote these words, as if automatically, on a clean sheet: *Orlando: A Biography*. No sooner had I done this than my body was flooded with rapture and my brain with ideas. I wrote rapidly... But listen; suppose Orlando turns out to be Vita." Vita Sackville-West was, along with Leonard Woolf, one of Woolf's great loves. *Orlando* became a fictional, fantastical, pseudo-biographical conglomerate of the many lives of Vita

Sackville-West, who was also a poet, cross-dresser, aristocrat, and consummate gardener (her estate was given to her family by Queen Elizabeth, and was then taken away from Vita in her lifetime because of her gender). "All these ancestors and centuries of silver and gold have bred a perfect body," Woolf said of Vita. Woolf wrote the book more quickly than any of her others, "at the top of her speed," and in higher spirits. She wrote to Vita, "It's all about you and the lusts of your mind." She was determined to break out of the rigid form of the novel saying, "I will never write a novel again," and *Orlando* will be "truthful but fantastic." *Orlando* is then part novel, part fabulation, part biography, part theatrical escapade, part poetry, and full of complex private messages to Vita, leading Vita's son to call it "the longest love-letter in the English language." *This note originally appeared in the program for Classic Stage Company's 2010 production of Virginia Woolf's Orlando. Reprinted with permission.*

DISCUSSION & FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- *Orlando* is described as a love letter from Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville-West. What elements of the story make it seem like these were her intentions?
- The characters in *Orlando* change gender and cross-dress throughout the play. What comment do you think this makes on the nature of gender and gender identity?
- Orlando decides she is in love with Shel when she realizes that he acts like a man but thinks like a woman. What do you think this indicates about the nature of male/female relationships and the perception of gender characteristics?
- Describe a time when you felt like you were acting like the opposite gender. What made you feel this way?
- Beyond gender and the role of women in society, what are other important themes in *Orlando*? How do they manifest themselves on stage?