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# Potter's Wheel of Fortune

With *Orlando*, the Director's Not Afraid of Virginia Woolf.

**H**ALFWAY THROUGH Sally Potter's *Orlando*, the hero, played by actress Tilda Swinton, discovers he has turned into a woman. "Same person, no difference at all, just a different sex," Orlando remarks casually upon catching sight of herself naked in a mirror. Having lived for over a century already—as a frustrated lover, a failed poet, a naive diplomat, and a reluctant soldier—she will spend the next 300 years discovering her true self.

Potter, who wrote and directed the adaptation of Virginia Woolf's classic novel, seems to be taking her big changes in stride as well. Following a triumphant U.S. premiere at the Sundance Film Festival and a prestigious position opening the Museum of Modern Art's New Directors/New Films series in March, her film goes into release in June from Sony Pictures Classics. Freely adapting the book—which she describes as a "very light vehicle" for some "very heavy questions"—Potter has, nonetheless, preserved the spirit of its reflections on immortality and androgyny.

"Just the word 'immortality' seems to open such a vein of longing, to understand death and to transcend the human life span," she reflects. "My own sense of life is that now, at the age of 43, I am on the same learning curve that I was on at seven or at three, and my hunger for experience is absolutely unabated." A dancer, choreographer, composer, and lyricist as well as a filmmaker, Potter is highly regarded as a pioneer of the British feminist film movement. But she now eschews this label or any others, saying, "Consciousness has no gender or sexuality; there is no such thing as feminine consciousness." Instead, she says that like Woolf, she believes an artist's mind is androgynous.

Spanning four centuries and featuring a striking cast that includes Quentin Crisp as Queen Elizabeth I and singer Jimmy Somerville as an angel, Potter's gender-crossed film is a visually dazzling, polysexual experience. And although it is generally believed that Woolf wrote her tale as a poetic love letter to novelist Vita Sackville-West, Potter argues that *Orlando* encompasses the "complexities of human sexuality in all its identities." Consequently her film does not wave a flag for any one sexual cause, she says, adding, "I hope that gay people and heterosexual people will both feel comfortable, and nobody feels excluded."—GERARD RAYMOND

*Gerard Raymond has written on film for Premiere and The Village Voice.*

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