

## The film

### Orlando's journey

Orlando's journey is trans-historical and framed by categories of history and themes. In each section a date followed by a sub-title is shown to the audience in the middle of a black screen. This title indicates a change in Orlando's life and a new set of values and attitudes to be critiqued. These titles are: Opening sequence, 1600 Death, 1610 Love, 1650 Poetry, 1700 Politics, 1750 Society, 1850 Sex and Birth.

The tradition of rhetorical subtitling can be linked in an ironic way to the practice of labelling sections in the Baroque aesthetic during the 18th century. The sub-title was intended to cover the complexities of the content in a section.

This re-structuring of the narrative connects with the ideas of Jacques Derrida. Non-linear structures reflect his theory of de-centred texts that emerged from a reading process called deconstruction. Through deconstruction, Derrida argued that texts can be seen to be composed of many competing cultural discourses from which a composer chooses ideas and values to foreground and privilege in a naturalised point of view from a particular perspective. As a result of deconstruction he exposed the logocentrism of patriarchy.

In Orlando's journey, Potter explores the themes of gender, love, being English and history. Her intention is to satirise biological and social determinism that was an intricate part of British imperialism. Potter wanted to show their impact on culture and male and female stereotyping over a period of 400 years of English history.

## Menippean satire

In the history of satire, Orlando is linked with the ancient Menippean tradition of Petronius's *Satyricon* or Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* by breaking the convention of mimetic historic realism. In this tradition works of art subvert our understanding of reality and art through representing a fantastic story. Orlando's metamorphosis is a part of the carnivalesque or 'fantastic' movement, leading to new spaces or worlds in art, often indicated by abrupt transitions. In a carnivalised view of the world, the rules of life undergo a series of metamorphoses. In the genre of Menippean satire composers play with its carnivalesque manner, transformations and experimental spaces or zones to explore the uncanny.

The main character in Menippean satire is given a dual existence – temporal or the then and now, and a mythical double gender identity of man and woman. Orlando is both a character of lightness and a character with uncanny traits making him/her a disturbing person to have encountered but one we never get to know. This is unlike the realist tradition where a protagonist is on a learning journey – usually shaped as a hero's journey structure that leads to a moral lesson. In Potter's story there is no examination of the protagonist's internal psychology because the focus is on the cultural surface and the protagonist as a cultural subject with symbolic significance. The film offers many perspectives, but there is a clear integrating purpose encouraging us to consider the value of androgyny and gender fluidity.

In this carnivalesque fantasy, historical situations and figures can be constructed in comic stereotypes and used to parody realism and gender classifications. The settings are not metaphors for real life but perform a metonymic function, symbolising an historical era in a satirical way. Potter constructs the worlds within her film using hyper-real images or simulacra, and they combine to visually dazzle the viewer with their spectacle. They represent cultural worlds subjectively, with details drawn from paintings of the period. Each vignette is colour-coded. The images combine to create a neo-Baroque and anti-real aesthetic.

Orlando's journey is one to freedom, independence and equality that is symbolic rather than moral.