



ORLANDO, MY POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY (12A)

Director: Paul B. Preciado

France, 2023, 1 hour 38 minutes, French + English subtitles

Someone once asked me: "Why don't you write your biography?"

I replied: "Because fucking Virginia Woolf wrote my biography in 1928."

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* has been adapted for the screen a number of times. From Sally Potter's sumptuous 1992 film starring Tilda Swinton, to Ulrike Ottinger's surreal German comedy, *Freak Orlando*, the story of Woolf's century-spanning gender-bending protagonist is ripe for reinterpretation. In this latest addition to the Orlando canon, philosopher Paul B. Preciado blurs the lines between fiction and documentary by exploring the experiences of trans and non-binary people, the Orlandos of the real world.

In the novel, Orlando's transition from male to female is as easy as waking up from a long sleep; the reality of transitioning, however, is not so kind. As much as Preciado identifies with Orlando, the frustrations of medical bureaucracy and administrative purgatory do not match up to Woolf's imaginings of a peaceful awakening in a new body. He stages a waiting room at a psychiatrist's office, full of his Orlandos, who are expected to jump through hoops in order to prove their own gender identity and to access hormonal therapy. This is the situation faced by those wishing to medically transition all across the world: indeed, in the UK, people can be left waiting for years to receive gender affirming care.

And yet the situation - as seen through Preciado's eyes - is not without hope. At the end of the film, he presents us with a scene in which a judge declares that the assignment of gender at birth will be abolished, before awarding planetary non-binary citizenship complete with a genderless passport to each of the Orlandos we have encountered throughout the film. Through this moment, we can imagine a future in which the question of gender isn't quite so fraught, and where those who do not fit neatly into a gendered category are not alienated by medical, legislative, and administrative processes. The message we are left with is that we are all Orlando.

Following the film's world premiere at Berlin International Film Festival 2023, *Orlando, My Political Biography* was awarded the Teddy Award for Best Documentary Film as well as the Encounter: Special Jury Award.

Notes compiled by Emily Mason

Preview courtesy of Picturehouse Entertainment