

**Freedom in Discipline:
Grounding Wild Impulse with Self-Mastery in Sarah Ruhl's *Orlando***

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Abstract

The following document is an exploration in practicing the power of discipline in Theatre@York's production of *Orlando*. This support document crafts a personal redefinition of discipline, examines the artistic fertility in practicing routine, and champions diving into the risk that growth demands. Supported by methodology from theatre practitioners such as Steven Wangh (a disciple of Jerzy Grotowski), Erika Batdorf, and Michael Chekov; investigations in dance and drag; and insights into the field of discipline from experts such as Steven Pressfield, Charles Duhigg, Carol S. Dweck, Katty Kay, and Claire Shipman, this text develops a creative process which includes breaking self-perceived limitations in physicality, consciously overhauling daily habits, and amending artistic blind spots. The ultimate objective of this written work is to create an approachable performance methodology that utilizes discipline as a gateway to greater artistic freedom.

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Artistic Challenge Introduction

Freedom in Discipline

Perhaps the biggest tragedy in our lives is that freedom is possible, yet we can pass our years trapped in the same old patterns (Tara Brach 166).

It is essential... that discipline should not be practiced like a rule imposed on oneself from the outside, but that it becomes an expression of one's will; that it is felt as pleasant, and that one slowly accustoms oneself to a kind of behaviour which one would eventually miss, if one stopped practicing it (Erich Fromm 103).

I grew up in a majestic old house encircled by fruit trees. I grew up in a tiny log cabin with one partitioned bedroom and one bathroom shared between my family of six. I grew up in an ivy-covered townhouse right on the ocean with just my mom and dad. I grew up in nine different homes by the time I was sixteen because my parents found it thrilling to fall in love with a new house, pack up, and move. I grew up with no chores, but secretly longed for some. I grew up in a house where people expressed themselves openly. I grew up in a house where spirited sing-a-long parties would stomp into the early morning, and my solicitations for sleep were met with a tempting call to get to the microphone and sing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow". I grew up in a house where late-night fights would reverberate between the walls, and it didn't matter what the children heard. I grew up in a house full of laughter. I grew up in a house with no rules.

I gained a lot by growing up amidst my pack of wild-hearted fire-starters, a good deal of which has served me as a performer. We speak up. We question conforming if our heart is not into it. We enjoy a strong connection to playfulness and impulse. We feel deeply and love fiercely. We take chances. We trust our instincts. We sense we have something to offer. We are willing to lay ourselves bare before other humans.

When considering my artistic challenge, however, a small voice inside of me made a familiar, but often ignored request. It uttered a word that would take some time to unpack. A word that felt so loaded that it demanded to be redefined. A word I did not grow up with. The longing I felt was for discipline.

I believe creating a strong relationship to discipline will elevate my innate sense of impulse and intuition to new heights; creating a fortified, supportive base on which to build greater specificity, confidence, and versatility as a performer. As an actor with a great passion for physical theatre, I am hungry to engage discipline as a means to expand what my body is capable of. As a free spirit, I am eager to anchor myself with routines and rituals to cultivate a deeper sense of grounding on and off the stage.

This simple word “discipline” unearthed all kinds of resistance in me, but I felt a deep desire to overcome my fears, and discover what a life with rigour and resilience has to offer. So my quest began: to fall in love with a concept I was taught to challenge, and to allow the word I had equated with limitations to become the pathway to new found freedom as an artist.

Reframing Discipline

For many artists, the word discipline evokes a sense of foreboding and anxiety. For me, it brings to mind a kind of militant order that sacrifices individuality for conformity. The idea of discipline felt confining and claustrophobic. Author and poet Natalie Goldberg observes in her book *Writing the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*: “Discipline has always been a cruel word. I always think of it as beating my lazy part into submission, and that never works. The dictator and the resister continue to fight” (25). I knew in order to truly get behind a sincere practice of discipline, I would need to clear away my long-held notions about the strict nature of rigour, and reframe it as an act of rebellion. As Steven Pressfield affirms in *The War of Art*, taking on a disciplined life does not equate to blindly following orders, but empowering oneself: “The paradox seems to be, as Socrates demonstrated long ago, that the truly free individual is free only to the extent of his own self-mastery. While those who will not govern themselves are condemned to find a master to govern over them” (37). I had a sense that the genuine nature of healthy discipline was not restrictive at its core: that it was, in fact, an essential element to freeing ourselves from the profoundly limiting nature of complacency.

Another block that I faced around integrating discipline into my life was the concern that such structure and routine would transform me into a perfectionist—a way of life that I find stifling to creativity. Katty Kay and Claire Shipman support this notion in their book *The Confidence Code*: “The irony is that perfectionism actually inhibits achievement... leading to piles of useless, unfinished work, and hours of wasted time, because, in the pursuit of it, we put off difficult tasks wanting to be perfectly ready before we start” (107).

In order to shift my perspective about discipline, I would need to dismiss my fear of it equating to perfectionism, and instead discover a different sense of the word that feels more authentic and positive. Through scouring a multitude of source materials that cover a wide-range of subjects—from productivity to resistance, confidence to communication, creativity and daily rituals—a clearer picture of the heart of discipline began to take shape. Rather than being concerned with perfection, healthy discipline asks that we just consistently show up for ourselves and the goals we set out. Instead of sticking close to what is safe and known, genuine discipline is eager to explore outside of comfort zones and charter new territory, whether or not the results garner anything close to perfection.

This realization fostered a final awakening in my mission to redefine discipline, which directly supports dismantling my tightly-clung ideas of what is and is not true. Authentic discipline requires that we shed our “fixed mindset”—the viewpoint that there are things we can or cannot do and that is simply who we are—in lieu of a “growth mindset”—the belief that with practice our capabilities can expand far past what we may assume. Stanford University psychologist, Carol S. Dweck, conducted decades of research and learned just how deeply our mind frame impacts our life. In her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dweck attests that mindset “permeates *every* part of your life. Much of what you think of as your personality actually grows out of this ‘mindset’. Much of what may be preventing you from fulfilling your potential grows out of it” (ix).

This breakthrough in the mindset we choose relates directly to my experiences with dance and movement as a performer. I am deeply drawn to physical work, and I have found some exciting

levels of play and expression with the range I currently possess. However, when it would come to choreography, or more regimented movement, I would feel incapable and locked up. Until this summer, I had always attributed this struggle to what I regarded as fact: I am innately incompetent when it comes to choreographed dance. Emboldened with this new information, however, I have challenged myself to recognize that my level of capability lay in direct relation to my level of practice. Activating a growth mindset creates an immediate sense of limitlessness and freedom, not only of what we are capable of, but what a practice of true discipline can bring to one's life.

Routine and Rituals

How have artists throughout the centuries harnessed their raw creativity with routine and rituals?

One of my first steps in exploring the freedom found in discipline began with Mason Currey's book *Daily Rituals: How Artists Work*, which sources letters, diary entries and biographies to track the very personal creative habits of some of the world's most celebrated artists. In the book's introduction, Currey speaks to the underrated power of routine:

The word connotes ordinariness and even a lack of thought; to follow a routine is to be on autopilot. But one's daily routine is also a choice, or a whole series of choices. In the right hands, it can be a finely calibrated mechanism for taking advantage of a range of limited resources: time (the most limited resource of all) as well as willpower, self-discipline, optimism. (xiv)

As I poured over these accounts of routines throughout history, two encouraging themes presented themselves. First, for many artists, grappling with routine was no easy feat, but time and again having a set creative regimen proved worth the wrestle. As French novelist, Gustav Flaubert, prescribed in a letter to his friend: "Be regular and orderly in your life like a Bourgeois so that you may be violent and original in your work" (qtd. in Currey 144). My resistance to

routine stood in good company, but just like the artists Currey examines, my newfound curiosity to work with routine, despite it not coming naturally, also placed me on the right track. After reading over and over again about the value in simply setting time aside to work each day, Flannery O'Connor's words rang simple and true, "Routine is a condition of survival" (qtd. in Currey 142).

The second theme that proved helpful in my mission was that consistent patterns arose in how these artists approached their routine. I learned most artists found it particularly productive to set out to work first thing in the morning; a great number of them would work three to four hours each morning and then take a break or stop for the day; many would take a long walk in nature and visit with friends when they stepped away from their post; they carried a writing utensil and paper with them at all times to track thoughts and ideas; and they often set little rewards to look forward to once they had finished their day's work. These consistencies provided a pattern of tried and true methods by which I plotted out my own morning routine.

Along with creating a regular work schedule, I decided to bolster my morning routine with a number of healthy lifestyle shifts. This plan meant I would be regularly reinforcing the power of choice; adding a greater sense of self-regulation to my day; and strengthening my willpower. I started a daily meditation practice; I began keeping a gratitude journal; and met each morning with lemon water as opposed to coffee. I also cut out all alcohol for three months and shifted my diet to focus largely on fruits and vegetables. While seeming basic on the page, the radical and conscious shift in how I lived my life each day stood as a testament to the transformative power of discipline. The new found strength that consistent action brought to my life shifted my

perception of the relatively pedestrian concept of routine and elevated it to the more profound custom of ritual.

I became fascinated with the relationship between humans and habit, and discovered in Charles Duhigg's book *The Power of Habit* that even small shifts away from poor choices in our daily routine can trigger a revolutionary change in our brain function: "When a habit emerges, the brain stops fully participating in decision making. It stops working so hard, or diverts focus to other tasks. So unless you deliberately *fight* a habit—unless you find new routines—the pattern will unfold automatically" (20). With this insight it became clear that when I took to my morning meditation practice, I wasn't just developing my ability to be present in the moment, but I was training my brain to be more present to the many choices it makes each day. Unexpectedly, routine revealed itself as a way of rebelling against unconsciousness.

Risk and Reward

After reframing my concept of discipline and practicing it with daily rituals, it came time to start taking bigger swings at my artistic challenge and revel in the realm of risk and reward. This component of my challenge often took place in public, where the cost of risk feels high, but the rush from putting oneself out there is all the greater. Through workshops and classes I challenged myself to get outside of my comfort zone and dispute the assumptions I held of what I am physically and mentally capable of. I learned that if I felt out of my depths I was in the right place. As Steven Pressfield urges in *The War of Art*: "The professional tackles the project that will make him stretch. He takes on the assignment that will bear him into uncharted waters,

compel him to explore unconscious parts of himself... So if you're paralyzed with fear, it's a good sign. It shows what you have to do" (40).

At The Batdorf Spring Intensive, I spent two weeks pushing myself mentally and physically to expose new depths of my being and share it with the group. The Batdorf Technique is described as "a thorough practice of learning to feel multiple sensations in the body simultaneously and in doing so, begin to recognize 'numbness' and dissociation and ways to move around physical and emotional blocks" (Batdorf). This full-day, two-week workshop taught me firsthand about the discipline of continuing to show up despite how painful and uncomfortable the journey may be. Throughout the workshop we dove deep into Erika Batdorf's seven elements of interoception - blood, breath, gravity, pain, pleasure, temperature, and digestion—and I unearthed a crucial point of focus for my artistic challenge: the need to further ground my feet and bring gravity to my work.

While the note I received from the TBT instructors about grounding and gravity could seem simple and technical, upon deeper consideration it occurred to me that it related directly to my challenge around discipline. On stage, and in life, I have felt more comfortable carrying myself in what Laban Movement Analysis would term as "float", "dab", and "glide", rather than "punch", "slash", and "press" (Adrian 175). Moving in my body can sometimes feel akin to being a kite improvising with the impulse of the wind, which can prove very useful for certain character bodies. However, as I am someone who is passionate about inhabiting a wide range of physicality, and in crafting rooted, honest performances, the challenge to ground myself further has been an important task.

From the perspective of eastern spirituality, grounding oneself relates directly to the first chakra, also called the root chakra, which not only rules over grounding, but stability, boundaries, and *discipline*. In her book *Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System as a Path to the Self*, therapist Anodea Judith shares these insights into the root chakra: “To build a strong foundation is to gain solidity. Solidity allows us to be firm and make boundaries. Solidity has consistency, repetition, accountability” (58). She goes on to recommend several practices to balance the root chakra, including Hatha yoga, massage and physical activity such as running or dance—all of which I have enfolded into my process. Along with these recommendations, I have incorporated exercises from Syntonics—an embodied practice that uses therapy balls to release dysfunctional tension in the body—as a means to anchor myself and align my posture, and will continue to do so throughout the year.

Perhaps the greatest risk, and the biggest stretch for me in my development, came in the form of taking dance classes at City Dance Corps. As an actor who loves to use movement in performance dance classes offered a great opportunity for growth, but as a human with a history of drowning in a sea of choreography this avenue of my challenge promised to be quite embarrassing. Yet, armed with my new growth mindset and a genuine excitement to move, I stepped into the studio with purpose.

I made a point of taking a wide variety of classes, from Modern Technique to Hip Hop; Dancehall to Bollywood. Dance class served up a wealth of practice in discipline: it demanded I take myself seriously and fearlessly embrace the different energies of each dance; it required me

to shut out the voice declaring that I lack an immediate sense of left and right in order to simply land the moves; it insisted I work through the sweat, confusion and exhaustion and give my very best. Dance classes also had me living in some very different rhythms, movements, and bodies, which I most definitely plan on drawing upon in future roles, including my work in *Orlando* this winter.

Prior to this experiment with movement I was more focused on the concern that I had nothing much to offer in dance but I came to recognize that, regardless of that worry, dance has a vast amount to offer me. The limitations I set out existed primarily in my mind to the detriment of my body. In *The Body Has Its Reasons: Self-Awareness Through Conscious Movement*, authors Thérèse Bertherat and Carol Bernstein warn that our physical outlook can become a self-fulfilling prophecy: “The more our bodies are strangers to us, the more we remain strangers to life. We lack confidence; there are so many things we don’t dare do. We think we’re incapable of doing them and very often we’re right” (49). Dance served up an experience that sashayed far beyond my comfort zone, but it also allowed me to feel more connected to my body and its possibilities. While I was far from excelling at the choreography, the act of simply *doing* left me with a greater sense of confidence - a correlation Katty Kay and Claire Shipman attest to:

You don’t get to ‘choose confidence’ and then stop thinking about it as your life miraculously changes around you... When we say confidence is a choice, we mean it’s a choice to *act*, or *do*, or *decide*... confidence is work, hard work and deliberative, though we have no doubt that it’s doable (137).

Conclusion: A Resilient Free-Spirit

Practicing true discipline asks us to embrace resilience, to be called to action from our highest self in the face of its ever-alluring opposite, resistance. The lure of what appears to be

momentary freedom can lock us down into a realm that is beneath our potential. Steven Pressfield captures the insidious nature of resistance vividly in his book *Do the Work*:

“Resistance will tell you anything to keep you from doing your work. It will perjure, fabricate, falsify; seduce, bully, cajole... Resistance will reason with you like a lawyer or jam a nine-millimeter in your face like a stick up man” (6). Through my research into discipline it became clear that in order to live my best creative life I must learn to meet resistance with resilience.

I am unabashedly proud of being a free-spirit. I am grateful to be filled with unbridled curiosity, passion and playfulness as an actor and a human. I would never want to diminish my innately wild nature, but my trek into the heart of discipline has taught me that I can cultivate deeper, stronger roots as an artist without compromising my freedom. In fact, by harnessing it to my advantage and personalizing my approach, a life of resilience has allowed for me to discover greater heights of liberation. I feel more capable of forgoing immediate gratification in lieu of legitimate progress; I have a greater sense of confidence due to practicing action over apathy; and I have developed an appetite for the thrill of playing well outside my comfort zone.

We are unquestionably shaped by our upbringing, and I am thankful for the fire, spirit and openness I possess as a result of my tribe and my genetics. However, growth beyond our imagination is within reach. With a conscious and adventurous practice of discipline each of us has an opportunity to create new rules to live by, refute our assumptions of what we’re capable of, and forge a new path to individuality.

Research Introduction

Virginia Woolf met poet and novelist Vita Sackville-West at a dinner party on December 14th, 1922. Woolf was quietly magnetized to this unusual aristocrat who seemed to elegantly straddle both feminine and masculine charms, and Vita wrote her husband just a few days later to praise Woolf's unaffected simplicity and "spiritual beauty" (qtd. in DeSalva and Leaska 22). While Vita already enjoyed a string of intense affairs with female friends, and Virginia herself had dabbled in dalliances with women before marrying her husband, this meeting sparked one of the most meaningful and transformative relationships of both of their lives. Virginia's fascination with Vita plunged to such depths that it would inspire one of her greatest works, *Orlando: A Biography*.

Woolf's protagonist, Orlando, is larger-than-life—an androgynous poet whose lifetime spans over 350 years, and whose gender flips from male to female at the age of thirty. Intensely multi-dimensional and incredibly complex, the role of Orlando offers up a tremendous opportunity to put all I have learned about discipline in action in order to employ the depth of investigation, detailed physicality, and daring fire that this role demands.

A Love Letter Becomes a Literary Treasure

While Vita was wild and powerful, Virginia was cerebral and delicate, but their many decades of letter-writing prove that despite their differences they inspired each other profoundly. Vita was hungry for greatness and lusted after Virginia's deep genius, while Virginia, prone to illness and unstable mental health, was stimulated by Vita's lust for life. Their early letters, filled with flirtations and fantasies, provide a road map where one can trace the beginnings of what would become Woolf's Modernist masterpiece *Orlando*.

Dreaming up stories around the vivacious young socialite became a regular pastime for Woolf. While Virginia was unwell in the summer of 1925, she wrote to Vita to confess she had a “perfectly romantic and no doubt untrue vision of you in my mind—stamping out the hops in a great vat in Kent—stark naked, brown as a satyr, and very beautiful” (qtd. in Glendinning 145). Meanwhile, vibrating with her insatiable exuberance for life, Vita wrote to Virginia in March of 1926: “I wish life was three times as long, and every day of it 48 hours instead of 24” (qtd. in DeSalva and Leaska 124) - potentially planting a seed of inspiration for Woolf’s device of bestowing Orlando with a lifetime that spans over three centuries.

About a year later, Virginia had a proposition for Vita: “Suppose Orlando turns out to be about Vita; and it’s all about you and the lusts of your flesh and the lure of your mind (heart you have none, who go gallivanting down the lanes with [Mary] Campbell)—suppose there’s a kind of shimmer of reality which sometimes attaches to my people...shall you mind?” (qtd. in Glendinning 181). Vita did not mind, in fact, she was delighted: “My God Virginia, if ever I was thrilled and terrified it is at the prospect of being projected into the shape of Orlando. What fun for you; what fun for me...Yes, go ahead, toss up your pancake, brown it nicely on both sides, pour brandy over it, and serve hot. You have my full permission” (qtd. in Glendinning 181).

Having won the approval of her muse, Woolf went on to weave a sprawling metafiction which Sackville-West’s son, Nigel Nicolson, would later praise as “the longest and most charming love letter in literature, in which she explores Vita, weaves her in and out of the centuries, tosses her

from one sex to the other, plays with her, dresses her in furs, lace and emeralds, teases her, flirts with her, drops a veil of mist around her” (qtd. in Rivera).

Arguably one of Woolf’s most beloved novels, *Orlando* examines the societal chasm separating the genders, the secret similarities between the sexes, and the history of English culture and literature. As the piece opens we find Orlando, a 16-year-old male aristocrat living in the Elizabethan era, morose and longing to be a true poet. We join him on his continual search to find meaning and identity through sex, love, literature, travel, wealth, and surrendering it all to live with a pack of wanderers. His life spans centuries while he ages little more than a decade, then at age thirty, without warning, he wakes to find he is now a female, allowing the reader a fresh perspective of what it would mean to suddenly live as a woman in a man’s world. Considered a literary “feminist classic” (Miller, “Who Was Vita Sackville-West?”), *Orlando* serves as a call for freedom in the face of cultural constraints around gender, marriage, sexuality, and nature. The piece quakes with questions about the duality of human nature, love and marriage, our relationship to our history, our sense of purpose, and our connection to home. It depicts a human, unbound by time and gender, and shows that beneath our societal conditioning we are all stumbling through life, seeking out a genuine sense of self that stands beyond categorization.

Inspired by the true details of Vita Sackville-West’s life but delivered with magical realism, Woolf employs a tongue-in-cheek biographic style from which she can both idolize and satirize her subject. From the safe perch of whimsical parody, Woolf deftly explores subversive ideas

around bisexuality, gender-fluidity, criticism of English literature and English society, and gender-inequality, all while serving it up to the reader as a charming romp.

On a personal level, penning this wild ride offered Woolf a chance to indulge her fascination for the seductive, yet elusive, Vita and she did not shy away from using specific events and images from the poet's life. Biographer Victoria Glendinning breaks down the incredible personal parallels between Vita and Orlando in *Vita: The Life of V. Sackville-West*:

Orlando is a young man in a great house in the first Elizabeth's reign, writing dramas with juvenile fluency, as had Vita. The delicious Russian princess Sasha with whom Orlando falls in love as they skate on the frozen Thames, and who betrays him, is Violet Trefusis 'Jour de ma vie', their coded signal for elopement, is the Sackville motto. 'The Land' [Sackville-West's great poetic work] becomes 'The Oak Tree', Orlando's *magnum opus*. (203)

In the public arena, this daring new work served as a turning point in Woolf's career. Just six months from its release, *Orlando* had already doubled the sales of her previous work *To the Lighthouse* and, as her husband Leonard Woolf remarked, "...the effect upon Virginia's earnings as a novelist was immediate" (qtd. in Glendinning 205). Only a month after its publication, a piece in the *Daily Chronicle* declared: "The book in Bloomsbury [a group of intellectuals founded by Woolf and her siblings] is a joke, in Mayfair a necessity, and in America a classic" (Glendinning 205).

Sackville-West's passions had cooled for Woolf well before she began writing the book in 1927, and she had already moved on to romance a number of other women. Creating *Orlando* provided Virginia with a way to bury her adoration for Vita in literature, and light her up from within for generations of readers to fall in love with. In his introduction to *The Letters of Vita Sackville-*

West to Virginia Woolf, Mitchell A. Leaska illustrates the emotional outlet Woolf found in crafting *Orlando*:

Virginia preserved for herself the Vita she loved in the spectacular world of *Orlando*. No matter how many slips in fidelity or how much gambolling there might be in the months and even years ahead, Orlando—the seductive aristocrat of Virginia’s imagination—would remain inviolate, safely beyond the menacing lure of other women, and permanently beyond the threat of loss. The Orlando of Virginia’s book had stepped outside the irrelevancies of life and into the purer chambers of art, where she would remain forever. Others might seduce Vita in the flesh, but no one could sully to Vita of Virginia’s creation. (32)

Historical Context

The 1920s: Shedding the Veil of the Victorian Era

Orlando was published in 1928—the same year British Parliament granted women the right to vote on the same terms as men. Woolf’s work expressed a deep frustration for the inequality between the sexes, and for the Victorian morals which only seemed to encourage a greater sense of gender divide.

Born Adeline Virginia Stephen in 1882 to a wealthy, stepfamily of eight, Woolf grew up in the last gasp of the Victorian era, when the doctrine of the separate spheres of gender reigned supreme. A man’s place was in the world, and his upbringing prepared him for such potential. A woman’s place was in the home, and she was raised with a strong sense of her limitations. For Woolf, this meant a great disparity between how she and her siblings were educated. While Virginia’s brother studied at Cambridge, she and her sister were schooled at home (Winterson, “Shape Shifter: The Joyous Transgressions of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*”).

Woolf was just thirteen years old when her mother passed away after battling influenza, triggering a series of depressions for Virginia which would haunt her throughout her life. When her father passed away only nine years later, Virginia and her siblings purchased a house in the Bloomsbury area of London. The home became a hub of creativity and thought. Virginia and her siblings formed a community of innovative thinkers called The Bloomsbury Group which included Roger Fry, E.M. Forster, Clive Bell, and Leonard Woolf—who became her husband in 1912.

The Bloomsbury Group was comprised of some of the greatest minds in the Modernist movement, which aimed to pioneer new methods in how reality was represented in the arts. In her TED-Ed Talk “Why Should You Read Virginia Woolf?”, Iseult Gillespie describes the pillars of Modernist storytelling, which point directly to the literary devices used in *Orlando*: “Key features of Modernist writing include the use of stream of consciousness, interior monologue, distortions in time, and multiple and shifting perspectives” (00:02:32 - 00:06:02).

The Adaptation and its Playwright

Sarah Ruhl was asked to adapt *Orlando* by Piven Theatre when she was just an emerging playwright of twenty-two years old, “before I was too old to realize that it might be a difficult task” (Ruhl, *Chekhov’s Three Sisters and Woolf’s Orlando* 136). Born in Willmetts, Illinois on January 24th, 1974 (just one day before what would be Woolf’s 92nd birthday), this commission from the theatre company she trained with as a child stands as her first professional credit in a career that has seen her become one of the most celebrated and produced contemporary playwrights in America. As Joyce Piven’s theatre company is expertly versed in “story theatre”,

Ruhl opted to capture the tale of *Orlando* through narration. Her interpretation is decisively loyal to the original work, explaining: “The reason I used a great deal of narration in this piece is that Woolf’s language is so much better than any of her imitators would ever be, and all the narration in the piece is hers and hers alone” (138). *Orlando* received its world premiere at Piven Theatre Workshop in Evanston, Illinois in 1998. In 2003, the show’s director, Joyce Piven, went on to produce the play with The Actor’s Gang in Los Angeles. The play received its New York premiere Off-Broadway at Classic Stage Company in 2010.

This adaptation of *Orlando* perfectly showcases what would become Ruhl’s trademark style, capturing “a mixture of the feminist and fabulist” (Isherwood, *The New York Times*). The playwright manages to convey “Woolf’s deliciously frolicsome tone, with the narrator merging the mock-serious voice of a sober biographer with a frank acknowledgment of the impossibility of teasing out truth from the mists of history” (Isherwood, *The New York Times*). Given that the play preserves Woolf’s narration, Ruhl is quick to clarify in her playwright’s notes what form of attack the actor and director must use to lift the words off the page. Her five “cardinal rules for narration” are:

1. Simplicity. When in doubt make a simple choice.
2. Emotional statedness. There is an emotional undercurrent in narration, it is not the neutral tone that ‘a narrator’ in a children’s play would adopt.
3. Non-literality or non-illustration. The actor need not always do the thing he or she is doing: the gesture need not illustrate the narration precisely.
4. Flux The nature of the narration will change, moment to moment. It needn’t have static rules to guide it.
5. The audience. The story is always for the audience. They are always there. The narration invites them in rather than distancing them. (137)

Sarah Ruhl would go on to create a string of celebrated plays such as *Eurydice* (2003), *The Clean House* (2004), and *In the Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)* (2009). Her works have been

nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and the Tony Award for Best Play. When she received the MacArthur Fellowship in 2006, the announcement described her plays as “vivid and adventurous theatrical works that poignantly juxtapose the mundane aspects of daily life with mythic themes of love and war” (MacArthur Foundation). In his piece for *The New Yorker*, “Surreal Life: The Plays of Sarah Ruhl”, John Lahr writes: “Her work is bold. Her nonlinear form of realism—full of astonishments, surprises, and mysteries—is low on exposition and psychology”. Ruhl expounds on this observation of her work being low on subtext in her book *100 Essays I Don’t Have Time to Write*, and she emphatically encourages an immediate, honest connection between the character and the words they speak:

If you are acting in a play of mine...please, don’t think one thing and then say another thing. Think the thing you are saying. Do not think of the language of the play as a cover or deception for your actual true hidden feelings that you’ve felt compelled to invent for yourself. Don’t create a bridge between you and the impulse for the language; erase the boundary between the two... There is no deception or ulterior motive or “cover” about the language. There are, indeed, pools of silence and the unsayable to the left or to the right or even above the language. The unsayable in an ideal world hovers above the language rather than below. (66)

In discussing the directorial approach to her plays, Ruhl also warns against being seduced into taking on a filmic approach, and champions the transcendent elements found in the works of the Greeks and Shakespeare: theatricality, magic, wild transformation and fearlessly engaging the audience. In defence of shattering the fourth wall she asserts: “To break the fourth wall, or the implied wall of glass, for the actors to read to, speak to, sing to the audience, is an ancient form of communication, which now seems almost revolutionary. Don’t make a wall of glass between your play and the people watching. Don’t forget they were once children, who enjoyed being read to, or sung to sleep” (110).

Research on Character

The Many Sides of Vita Sackville-West

When researching a character, an actor must sometimes become an inventor, piecing together subtle clues to create some deeper sense of “self”. In the case of Vita Sackville-West and the Orlando she inspired, her lifetime provides an embarrassment of riches: from her years of devoted letter-writing, her poetry and novels, her diary entries, to the many impressions accounted for by most anyone she met and invariably charmed. The more research one conducts into the life and character of Sackville-West, the more evident it becomes how expertly Virginia Woolf captured her in the imperfect hero-heroine of Orlando. For the most prevalent themes explored in *Orlando*, were also the most pressing issues in Vita’s own life...

Duality

Vita was a “catalogue of contradictions” (Leaska 11), however this mélange was not cause for conflict for Vita, as she embodied an open-mindedness that saw duality as only natural. As biographer Victoria Glendinning affirms: “With Vita both were possible. She was a person who saw both sides of a coin at the same time” (68).

Born at her palatial family estate in Kent, England on March 9, 1892, Vita was the only child of Lord and Lady Sackville-West. Throughout her life, she would trace the origin of her dualistic nature back to her parents. Born in Paris, her mother was the love child of unmarried English diplomat Lionel Sackville-West and Josefa Durán, an internationally famous Spanish dancer. From her maternal decent, Vita attributed her adventurous spirit, her lusty sexuality, and her deeply passionate nature. Meanwhile, Vita’s father, also named Lionel Sackville-West, was the

nephew to her grandfather and came from a lineage of English nobility that reached as far back as the history of England itself. While Vita often lived outside the lines of convention, she also had a genuine love of tradition, history, and the English countryside, which she credited to her paternal ancestry. Thus, she was a wanderlust who also ached for home; she had countless same-sex love affairs while remaining dutifully bound to her husband; she longed to run away with the Romany wayfarers of her mother's heritage, but also felt passionately connected to her aristocratic roots; she felt at home in men's clothing, but was happily the picture of elegance in a dress. "She was rebellious and she was reticent. She was fearless and she was frightened; she was sociable and reclusive; bold as well as shy" (Leaska 11).

In the spring of 1918, her friend and admirer, Violet Keppel confronted Vita about the magnitude of her duality, which gave way to a deeper acceptance of her sexuality, as she would later confess in the book *Portrait of a Marriage*: "Violet had struck a secret in my duality; she attacked me about it, and I made no attempt to conceal it from her or from myself" (qtd. in Glendinning 91). This awakening was followed by a tempestuous and passionate love affair between Violet and Vita, which Virginia Woolf would later capture in the romance between Sasha and Orlando. Biographer Victoria Glendenning paints a vivid portrait of Vita's new found freedom:

Vita was embarking for the first time on what she called 'the best adventure'. In her Ebury Street house she put on men's clothes, met Violet at Hyde Park Corner, and tall thin 'Julian', smoking a cigarette, strolled around mayfair with his much shorter, plumper girlfriend. 'The extraordinary thing was, how natural it was for me.' (95)

Love and Marriage

Vita was an intensely romantic soul, but she had a complicated grasp on commitment, perhaps due to witnessing her parents' many entanglements. She was driven by an all-consuming need to

love and be loved, but her fiercely independent nature would only permit her paramours to get so close. As Mitchell A. Leaska explains in his introduction to *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*: “Not far from the surface, one could touch the stargazer, the lonely Vita who sought privacy and shunned messy emotional embroilments. Yet it was this same woman who lived often enough on false promise and counterfeit hope, who seemed forever fanning the embers of love and forever stepping back from its blaze” (11).

Sackville-West had some very modern notions about what marriage should be. Throughout her life, she expressed a sincere and meaningful attachment to her husband, Harold Nicolson, but she was also open about her need for independence and space to maintain her sense of self. In *Vita: The Life of V. Sackville-West*, several letters from Vita to Harold capture this need for freedom. In correspondence to her husband in the early years of their marriage she wrote: “Perhaps you won’t understand when I say it is almost a relief to be parted...For once I have time to look around and realize, which otherwise I never have. I can get outside it, and outside you, and outside us” (79). Fortunately, in Harold she found a partner who was open-minded about challenging tradition. She would later confide in him: “The whole system of marriage is wrong...It ought, at least, to be optional; and no stigma if you prefer a less claustrophobic form of contract. For it *is* claustrophobic” (171).

Virginia illustrates Vita’s fiercely romantic side with lively detail in *Orlando*, but she also manages to capture how Vita’s primal nature could be baffled by some of the confines of “civilized” society, almost as if she were a wild animal confounded by bizarre, human rituals. When the narrative reaches the Victorian era, Woolf writes: “Orlando could only suppose that

some new discovery had been made about the race; that they were somehow stuck together, couple after couple, but who had made it, and when, she could not guess. It did not seem to be Nature” (157).

Writing and Personal History

If Vita’s greatest addiction was romance, her greatest passion was writing. She longed to be great, and her ferocious appetite to write overtook her when she was just a girl of twelve: “She always had a work in progress...She wrote ballads and plays and historical novels...Her writing comprised her day-dreams given fluent expression...The fantasy was Knole [her family estate], her ancestors and herself. History at Knole was continuous, personal and tangible” (Glendinning 24). Once she was old enough to be granted access to Knole’s Muniment Room - filled with centuries worth of her ancestors’ letters, wills, menus of feasts long past - she explored the legends of her Sackville relatives through writing:

Her earliest poems were ballads about long-gone members of her family: Herbrand de Sackville, who came over with William the Conqueror; Sir Roger West, henchmen of the Black Prince; Thomas Sackville, who brought from Queen Elizabeth to Mary Queen of Scots the news of her coming execution. So tactful was Thomas that Mary gave him her carved Calvary—still on the altar in the chapel at Knole. (Glendinning 25)

Vita’s parents worried her writing meant they had an eccentric daughter on their hands, and the “obsessional private activity disturbed them” (Glendinning 26), but she would not be deterred. Through writing, she found an outlet to express her deeply entrenched dualities and fantasies, her history, and a sense of self that stood beyond being anyone’s daughter, lover, wife, or mother.

Woolf cleverly conveys the constant that writing played in Sackville-West's life by giving Orlando the masterwork "The Oak Tree", which he/she continually turns to and adds to throughout the tumult of their life:

Orlando felt in the bosom of her shirt as if for some locket or relic of lost affection, and drew out no such thing, but a roll of paper, sea-stained, blood-stained, travel-stained - the manuscript of her poem, "The Oak Tree"...she turned back the first page and read the date, 1586, written in her own boyish hand. She had been working at it for close on three hundred years now...how very little she had changed all these years. (153)

Freedom in Nature

Beneath the wealth, the lust and literature, the hunger for adoration and adulation, the only thing Vita felt she could truly trust was nature. In *Orlando* we find the hero-heroine betrayed by love, betrayed even by the world of poetry, and an outsider from the norms of society—but they continually find sanctuary in the pure, simple wisdom of nature. Woolf so frequently connects Orlando to nature that it becomes one of the strongest, most true relationships in the novel. Woolf writes that Orlando's "God was Nature" (91) and that "two things alone remained to him in which he now put any trust: dogs and nature; an elk-hound and a rose bush" (58). When the narrative describes the heroine momentarily entrenched in shame around not having found (or even wanting) a husband, Orlando hits upon the joyful epiphany that she is "nature's bride" (161).

Sackville-West questioned many of the constructs of human society—gender roles, sexuality, marriage - but she took great comfort in the simple truths of nature and the sense of freedom it inherently bestowed far from the crush of bustling civilization. An avid gardener, Vita took refuge from high society in the dirt, finding inspiration in the straightforwardness of nature—a connection she captured at length in her epic poem "The Land":

She walks in the loveliness she made,
 Between the apple-blossom and the water--
 She walks among the patterned pied brocade,
 Each flower her son, and every tree her daughter.

Conclusion

“I have sought happiness through many ages and not found it; fame and missed it; love and not known it; life - and behold, death is better” (Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* 161).

Vita Sackville-West was a woman with the world at her fingertips. A wealthy family, a career in the arts, a magnetic charisma, and a string of admirers—from the outside it would appear that she had it all. However, Vita suffered greatly from the rules and regulations enforced by “proper” society. Because she was a woman, she was barred from inheriting her beloved family estate when her father passed away—the place that inspired her love of nature, her passion for history, and served as her first creative muse. While she continually fell in love with women, and felt more at home in men’s clothing, she toed the line of propriety, staying married to her husband and remaining closeted for most of her life. Though Vita was a celebrated writer, she feared she may never mature into the literary genius she longed to be, and was haunted by "the true art of expression and feeling that was always just out of her reach—the element that Virginia felt was lacking from her writing" (Glendinning 204). Who was she without her home, her right to love, and her sense of worth as a writer? Throughout the novel and the play, we follow Orlando on the quest to answer that burning question, and we see our own search for identity, truth, and freedom reflected back at us.

Artistic Challenge in Practice

The role of Orlando offers up a wealth of complexities. He/she demands an ability to swing genders and skip through centuries, all while maintaining a through-line of character and a profound sense of objective. The character of Orlando is a wonderfully free spirit that requires a disciplined performative strategy to pull off the juggling act of their epic journey.

In preparing to take on Orlando, I will harness my organic approach to discipline, while maintaining a strong hold on simplicity and a sense of play. My process will include three major components, each helmed by one of the three guideposts I have enlisted in demystifying my approach to discipline: *Reframe*, *Routine* and *Risk*. First, I will *reframe* my own sense of self and physicality with the aim of taking on the masculinity of young Orlando, using discipline as a means to neutralize my personal tendencies to make way for more authentic characterization to take root. Next, I will employ *routine* to face my challenges around grounding and alignment by crafting regular daily and weekly practices, and creating a detailed and personalized warm up to use before rehearsal and performance. Finally, I will relish *risk* as part of developing my character, both by mining the text for the opportunities to challenge myself beyond my comfort zone, and by continuing to work with dance to build a stronger connection between Orlando and the different centuries they inhabit. The Reframe-Routine-Risk structure is simple yet activating, encouraging an expansion of mindset, a cultivation of true practice, and a healthy appetite for consistent experimentation.

Reframe: Gender is a Performance

Nature doesn't draw the line for us between male and female...we actually draw that line on nature. (Alice Dreger 00:06:12 - 00:18:48)

Discipline can demand a kind of “undoing” in order to reach greater depths of potential. The role of Orlando provides a thrilling opportunity to strip away my own social and self-conditioning as a rather feminine woman in order to fully own the traditionally masculine mentality and physicality from which the character originates.

In *Orlando* Woolf argues that gender is more of a societal construct than anything else, but she also makes a point of examining the permeating ways in which clothing, laws, outside treatment, and place in society shape one’s sense of gender, and in turn one’s sense of self. Woolf’s simple observation on how the two sexes observe the world provides a very clear and powerful means of approach for an actor taking on the role of Orlando: “The man looks the world full in the face, as if it were made for his uses and fashioned to his liking. The woman takes a sidelong glance at it, full of subtlety, even suspicion” (121). With cutting brevity, Woolf captures how a life lived as a man is often endowed with a great sense of freedom and entitlement.

Taking on the innate entitlement of male Orlando requires flipping my natural tendencies. I often over-apologize, shrink away physically, and ask for permission from the outside. In exploring more traditionally male energy, I plan to ban myself from reflexively apologizing and push myself to take up more space in public and private. I will connect to my primal energy through physical exertion (running, sit-ups and push-ups etc.), by continually reminding myself of my right to be most anywhere, and by tracking and neutralizing some of my more “feminine” physical tendencies.

I will also experiment with dropping away key elements of my daily “costuming”—a concept around self-presentation examined in Steven Wangh’s book *Acrobat of the Heart*. Wangh asserts that the seemingly harmless ways we prefer to dress, wear our hair, hold ourselves in our day to day life can potentially limit us as performers if we cling to them:

No one but you knows how your everyday ‘costume’ serves you, what energies or images it projects or hides. Perhaps even you do not know. But your job as an actor is to employ all of yourself on stage, so I suggest that you experiment with your costume. See what happens to you and your work if you remove some of the externals to which you are attached. (41)

Removing my social costume will mean stripping away the deeply ingrained habits in how I present myself. While I am by no means a person who is heavily made-up in public, I nearly always wear eyeliner and mascara, and I invariably wear my hair down. I hide behind this mask— it comforts me, it gives me greater self-assurance, and it limits me. While preparing Orlando I will make a conscious effort to spend more time without makeup, with my hair up, and attempt to drop away some of my feminized physical tropes (such as touching my hair, unconsciously shifting up into a higher vocal register, or collapsing myself into a smaller position when sitting.)

I took my first step into dropping away my typical “costuming” this December when I attended a Bearded Tea, hosted by Kit Boulter, a local drag king and non-gender-conforming artist. The event consisted of a small gathering of people who share an interest in drag king culture, coming together for tea and a tutorial on how to apply a beard made of glitter, a popular accessory for some drag performers. With compassionate awareness of how early I was in my journey, Kit warned me that if I partook in the “bearding” that night I would have to walk home with my freshly-minted facial hair. Initially, I did not think I felt ready for that—I thought it could suffice

to speak with them and to witness the glitter beard process—but once it came around to my turn I decided to take the leap. I was quite certain I would not feel as at home in facial hair as the others attending that night, but once I saw myself with a beard I was surprised to find how great I felt. Looking in the mirror a much cockier, more sexually aggressive character immediately surfaced which caught me off guard. I remarked how this “beard mask” turned me into someone else, and Kit clarified that it is all me, just a part of me that I rarely allow to the foreground. I walked home that night giddy and exhilarated at how exposed and empowered I felt without my typical social mask on.

To further explore the physical range required to play Orlando, I plan to work in a one-on-one session with drag king and theatre performer Titus Androgynous to mine out any blind spots I may have in taking on male physicality, and I will be sure to journal about the process.

Routine: Practices for Grounding and Alignment

Routine is the lifeblood of discipline—it is comprised of all the tiny, seemingly insignificant steps that, when diligently practiced, create true and potentially lasting changes. My experiments with routine this past summer taught me three important lessons: routine is best executed first thing in the morning; new habits are strengthened by being paired with other routine practices; and a consistent program truly fosters real change (my disciplined approach to health over the summer has resulted in drastically healing my psoriasis—which continues to astonish and thrill me—and knowing I can make such changes and sustain them for a long period of time has bolstered up my sense of what I am capable of.)

I plan to create a practice for physical and mental grounding, that will give me a stronger sense of rootedness and strength on and off stage. However, I want to be sure not to use these practices to sink into an unfettered state of calm—while that sounds lovely it will not serve me when taking on a variety of heightened states in performance. Instead, I will harness a practice that allows me a more immediate and authentic connection to my power and presence, and my right to be anywhere.

Before I share the regimen I have planned out, I recently had a breakthrough in alignment which is integral to my challenge around grounding. For a year and a half I have been consistently receiving notes on my alignment from most of my movement professors. I've been told my head and neck sling forward, my hips tilt forward (sending my pelvis backwards), my legs have an inward turn to them, and that I have an imbalance in my weight distribution. As a person who enjoys a fair amount of mobility, and feels quite free physically, it has been difficult to go from thinking of my body as my ally, to at times feeling it is working against me. Aside from having a long torso and shorter legs I could not determine what the root cause of my alignment issues might be. Just a few weeks ago, I mentioned the notes I was getting to my masseuse and she quickly pointed out that I have flat feet. I immediately recalled that flat feet run in my family. Upon further investigation, I learned fallen arches cause a host of problems with alignment including and inward angling of the hips, knees, and shins, anterior pelvic tilt, and a forward swing of the head and neck - all the issues I am contending with. With this new information, I have made an appointment to work with a physiotherapist in the new year, and in the mean time I have collected a number of exercises designed to strengthen the arch, which I will be incorporating into my routines

In plotting out my deliberate practice in pursuit of planted power I have broken up my routines between weekly physical and daily mental applications.

Bi-Weekly Physical Practices (practiced a number of times each week)

Pilates, Yoga (Hatha, Vinyasa, Restorative, and yoga for feet), Syntonics exercises, Suzuki stomps with affirmations (I have a right to be here, I have a right to take up space, I am supported by the earth), running, neck/pelvis/feet exercises for strengthening and alignment, sit-ups and push-ups, walks in the forest.

Daily Mental Practices

Meditation, contributions/wins lists as a self-confidence practice, cut out reflexive and needless apologizing, stripping away my “public costuming”, speak up without self-doubt but also practice selective speaking (sit with my thoughts longer before speaking), regular therapy sessions.

Again, I plan to utilize the same mindset around grounding as I did with discipline as a whole—rather than thinking of it as a challenge that is outside of my wheelhouse, I will instead treat it as a part of myself that simply needs more practice, and a means to new levels of personal freedom. In my mind’s eye I will replace any mental picture I have of a strict dance teacher bemoaning my shortcomings in grounding and alignment with this beautiful imagery from Rainer Maria Rilke that likens grounding to a form of conscious yielding: “If we surrendered to the earth’s intelligence we could rise up rooted, like trees.”

In my journey to find more grounding and alignment, it is also essential I practice compassion and patience with myself, and maintain a gentle approach matched with sincere diligence. As Carol S. Dweck reminds us in her book *Mindset*, fostering new habits does not equate to the immediate disappearance of our old ways:

Change isn’t like surgery. Even when you change, the old beliefs aren’t just removed like a worn-out hip or knee and replaced with better ones. Instead, the new beliefs take

their place alongside the old ones, and as they become stronger, they give you a different way to think, feel, and act. (224)

Warm Up

As a performer, I have always found space and time to warm up before a show, though I mostly stuck to basics - a few stretches, briefly warming up my voice, navigating some tongue twisters, and then running all of my lines. While it has been a consistent practice in my career, I feel there is room for my warm up to become more activating, empowering, and focused on creating alignment and grounding. I have recently come across Steven Wangh's perspective on warm ups in his book *Acrobat of the Heart*, and I appreciate the curiosity and presence of mind he encourages: "Above all remember, the warm-up is not an assignment, not calisthenics, and not a chore. It is a questioning process and a gift you are giving to yourself" (37).

With this in mind I plan to incorporate more elements into my warm up, and to always start with an open moment of inquiry and connection with my body and state of being. Also, when I mentioned to my masseuse about my mission to connect to further grounding, she recalled that her mentor had instructed her to end all clients who seek grounding at the feet as oppose to the head. While I plan to continue to end all massages at the feet, I was inspired to implement the practice of ending all my warm ups at the feet as well.

Elements of New Warm Up

Ten Points Grounding exercise; Syntonics Hammock exercise with balls; Hatha yoga stretches (Cat-Cow, Downward Dog, Sun Salutations, Warrior poses); voice and breath work with legs up wall (as per David Smuckler), getting very physical and exerting a lot of energy to charge up power centres (as per The Batdorf Technique), end on feet (rolling foot massage ball; massaging the feet with my hands, stretching and flexing the feet.)

Risk: Diving into Blind Spots

While it is essential that an actor identify what common ground they share with a character they are preparing to play, it is perhaps even more important to root out the greatest differences that stand between the performer and their character, in order to occupy the role more fully. As Russian actor, director and theatre practitioner Micheal Chekov advises: “It will be a good starting point for an actor, in order to grasp the initial idea about the character he is going to perform on the stage, to ask himself: ‘What is the difference - however subtle or slight this difference may be - between myself and the character as it is described by the playwright?’” (qtd. in Wangh 272)

As the novel *Orlando* nears its end, Woolf has written a beautiful passage in which the heroine examines her sense of self, listing a great number of traits, and making for a fantastic character sketch to draw upon for performance. For the interest of brevity and clarity I have edited the passage down to just the traits she lists:

A snob am I? The garter in the hall? The leopards? My ancestors? Proud of them? Yes!..

Greedy, luxurious, vicious? Am I? (here a new self came in). Don’t care a damn if I am...

Truthful? I think so...

Generous?...

Spoilt? Perhaps. Too many things for nothing. Hence my books...facile, glib, romantic.

More clumsy, I couldn’t be.

'Love'...she laughed and blushed and then cried out... A toad set in emeralds! Harry the Archduke!...(here another self came in.) But Nell, Kit, Sasha?(she was sunk in gloom: tears actually shaped themselves and she had long given over to crying).

I love trees...

And barns...

And the night.

But people...People? I don't know. Chattering, spiteful, always telling lies...I like peasants. I understand crops.

Fame!...Fame!

Haunted! ever since I was a child. There flies the wild goose. It flies past the window out to sea. Up I jumped...and stretched after it. but the goose flies too fast...I fling after it words like nets. (203-204)

When considering this list of various very human traits, I feel a great kinship to Orlando. I have a side of me that I could reluctantly describe as spoiled and greedy; I certainly identify with being clumsy; I am truthful nearly to a fault; I can both laugh at love and be brought down to my knees by it; I have a profound affinity for trees and nature; and I most definitely can feel haunted by life and how I have fallen short. However, despite sharing a great deal of similarities with the character of Orlando, there is one unmistakable difference which I must find a way to connect to in order to play this role: Orlando's insatiable need for fame. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this hunger for greatness and recognition was a key part of Vita's character as well. While researching her life, I repeatedly came across comments about her lust for admiration and her manner of seeing life as a game she just had to win. In the introduction to *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, Mitchell A. Leaska writes: "Vita's orientation to the world was one of

competition and conquest, and hers was an aggressive stance. The very notion of submission was foreign to her nature and menacing to her deepest and most vulnerable sensibilities” (29).

In order to inhabit Orlando fully, I must cultivate my inner swagger and thrust. This endeavour fortunately goes hand in hand with my work around occupying a traditionally masculine frame of mind, and even my efforts to find more grounding. With this need to conquer in mind, I will approach each scene with a tenacious hunger to “win” my particular objective for that moment in Orlando’s life, and to mindfully track throughout the scene how close I am to capturing my goals.

It is important to clarify that Vita and Orlando’s need to win was far from desperate, and fuelled more by entitlement, blissful arrogance and a proclivity for domination. As Virginia writes, Orlando “liked to think she was riding the back of the world” (212). Sackville-West was consistently drawn to taking on a dominant role in her affairs with women. Her novel *Challenge*, which I will be reading for further research, casts herself as the male lead and her lover Violet as his paramour, and powerfully expresses Sackville-West’s appetite for sexual domination. In his introduction to *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, editor Mitchell A. Leaska paints a vivid picture of Vita’s commanding nature which will serve as my inspiration for Orlando’s audacious drive: “The indomitable woman who took charge of one’s life and chartered one’s destiny, whose arrogance flattened obstacles...the heroic Vita who worked like a slave and played like a prince and saw the whole world as her personal challenge” (12).

I plan to expand beyond any submissive tendencies and blind spots I may have and develop a greater lust for dominance. I believe my work with routine will be helpful in expanding my desire to conquer as well—from running on the treadmill while blasting music to hype me up, to keeping a journal to track my small wins each day. However altruistic a perspective I have held towards life thus far, taking on Vita/Orlando's sense of fire, feistiness and fight could prove to be empowering and important work for me on both an artistic and personal level.

Defining the Centuries Through Dance

One of the key elements in *Orlando* is how Woolf tosses her protagonist from one century into the next. From the Elizabethan era all the way to 1928, when the novel was published, Orlando travels through time as if it was a perfectly natural thing to do, offering the reader a breathtaking journey through the shifting cultures of each century. In approaching this role it is important to me to find avenues in which to define these very different time periods so that I can fully inhabit, or push against, the spirit of each age. How does one begin to understand the rhythms, customs and values of an era? As York University movement professor Gwentyth Dobie advised *Orlando*'s director Lindsay Bell, looking to the popular dances of the time can provide a wealth of cultural information.

As expressed in my artistic challenge, choreographed dance does not come naturally to me, yet I am determined to take a risk and transform this discipline into an ally in my rehearsal process. In her three-part BBC series *Dancing Cheek to Cheek: An Intimate History of Dance*, historian Lucy Worsely investigates the formative dances in Britain in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and purports there is much to learn about a time period's social history from the dances they loved most. I plan to study each of the dances she explores in the series—the formality of

Minuet in the 18th century, the romance of the Waltz in the 19th century, and the independence of the Charleston in the 20th century—and employ each as a blue print for the physicality and essence of each era.

Mindset Heading into Rehearsals

By diligently reframing my self-dictated limitations, leaning into a conscious routine, and continually pushing myself past my comfort zone, I will craft a creative method that makes discipline both approachable and empowering. Just as the wild and spirited Orlando could not be confined by outside perception, confronting my artistic challenge will allow me to break past my own self-perceived barriers around resilience and rigour to find greater depth, complexity, and power on and off the stage.

Conclusion

The avoidance of discomfort is shortsighted at best, and it translates to lots of closed doors. Feeling uncomfortable isn't necessarily an indication that you're engaged in something that your soul doesn't want; usually, it indicates only that you're resisting your experience.
(Briana and Dr. Peter Borten, 148)

As a sensual and sensitive human I have primarily been driven towards what feels good and categorized what seems overly challenging as something which is beyond my scope of skill. Facing down my artistic challenge has forced me to toss a sobering light on my relationship to discipline and how it plays a direct role in my resilience and versatility as an actor.

Choosing to examine discipline through the pillars of *reframe*, *routine*, and *risk* has allowed me to take authorship of my exploration—shifting my perception of control from a sense of blindly

following an outsider's idea of what one "should do", to tenaciously pursuing what one has set out to do for oneself. The simple structure of these three touchstones provided a groundwork that was easy to follow—throughout the rehearsal process when I bumped up against inner-resistance I was able to discover a shift in perspective by *reframing* the issue, a call to action by practicing a *routine*, and a sense of adventure by embracing *risk*.

When I chose discipline as the focus of my artistic challenge, I had not anticipated just how urgently personal resilience would come into play in taking on the role of Orlando. While the script inherently offers a wealth of physical challenges in the shift of gender, and by cycling through a number of centuries, our particular production provided a great deal of technical hoops to jump through. From rollerblading on stage to a number of costume quick-changes while speaking text, *Orlando* made for an incredibly fertile playground on which to take on my artistic challenge.

What I found most helpful throughout this process was remembering to strive for a growth mindset, keeping a daily meditation practice, taking on challenges one small step at a time, and reminding myself to enjoy the risk of it all. While much of my focus on discipline was given to practicing these technical hurdles, I feel I was also able to get a strong hold on my objectives to find a greater sense of grounding on and off the stage, to dive deep into male physicality, to dismantle my social costuming, and to take up more space. I found time to devote attention to my feet through giving them lots of physical care, and by observing healthier habits I found a means to deepen my resilience as a performer as I was healthy for the entire process (often I get a cold at some point while working on a show.)

Due to committing so much time and energy to practicing the unforeseen technical elements of the show, certain aspects of my plan were not incorporated on a consistent level. Moving forward I plan to give more attention to my alignment on stage—I feel I was still in survival mode for much of this production, which meant I was likely dwelling in more of a fight-or-flight form of alignment than I would have liked. I did see a physiotherapist about my flat feet and alignment in January, but he did not seem to understand what the issue was if I was not experiencing any pain. I continue to work with my Syntonics balls and practice yoga in hopes of making some headway in how I hold my body.

I also aim to build a stronger relationship to selective speaking as part of my continued mission towards discipline. During this run I felt compelled to speak up about practicalities or my safety on occasion. I am still sorting out what the balance between silence and worthy dialogue is, as I know there are moments when it is essential for an actor to speak up. However, the Director Lindsay Bell and I seemed to strike a good balance between frank communication, compromise, and creative connection. I still hope to go on a silent retreat to build a stronger connection between myself, silence, and when I choose to speak.

Throughout the rehearsal process I continued to struggle to find an ease with set choreography. I look forward to taking more dance classes to increase my confidence and capabilities in this realm. Given my passion for physical theatre and my love of improvised explorations, I feel I have some exciting abilities to unearth in the world of movement and dance. I am certain it will take time to make significant improvements in what I am capable of, but I am eager to pursue

this artistic discipline so that I can offer a greater sense of precision, fluidity and command as a physical performer.

I have a deep sense of gratitude for being tasked with taking on my artistic challenge as part of my MFA in Acting, and I am completing this stage of my journey eager to continue to strengthen my relationship to rigour and resilience. In my artistic practice, this pursuit of discipline has shown me a greater capacity for strength, endurance, grounding, patience, and growth. On a personal level, this quest has led to naturally healing my skin after a 20-year battle with psoriasis, and triggered the development of personal boundaries, greater self-care, and a fortified sense of integrity.

While freedom and discipline seem to live on opposite ends of an experiential spectrum, I am more certain than ever that they are symbiotically bound together. The promise of new levels of freedom ignites the fire to practice discipline, and one can only reach true freedom with a genuine commitment to the discipline it will take to get there. Comfort is not the equivalent to freedom. Discomfort does not equate to inability, or a loss of liberty. Fully freeing myself from my old habits to unleash my deepest potential may not be easy or immediate, but with my new-found appreciation for discipline I will continue to make lasting progress one small and consistent step at a time.

Journal Entries

Saturday, February 16th - Overwhelm and Resilience

While putting my artistic challenge to practice I am discovering it is as much about trying to develop inner-strength than anything else. Inner-strength and resolve through discipline.

When a task seems too demanding and/or complicated I can tend to become overwhelmed and go into a place of self-doubt. In rehearsals for *Orlando* it recently became clear that my character would spend much of the show's first act on rollerblades. In the script, Ruhl has Orlando and Sasha on ice, then swinging into scenes on land, then back on ice, and I believe this will be the first time a production has used actual skates rather than movement to convey the scenes on the frozen river. While I am excited about this creative and daring interpretation of the script, we do not yet have the skates, and the last time I was on rollerblades was nearly 20 years ago (and even then I never mastered stopping). I worry about my abilities to skate on a stage for long periods and still stay focused on performing. Safety concerns also cross my mind—my brother recently got a concussion while working on a theatre gig, and he had to drop out to the show due to the magnitude of his symptoms.

What I like about a practice of discipline is that it can take something that feels utterly overwhelming, and pair it down into small, manageable steps. It asks me to hold back on judging myself on what I can or cannot do. It calmly says, “well, let's just see.”

I know I have a deeper well of inner-strength and ability than my fears will allow me to believe. I feel enlisting my pillars of discipline (reframe, routine, risk) will help build a structure around me that will enable me to connect with how competent, resilient and fearless I can be:

Reframe: While I fear I am being asked to do blocking that will not be possible on skates, I can choose to trust that everything will be staged with realistic expectations once the skates are actually on.

Routine: I will find security in regular daily practice in the skates so that I become incredibly comfortable and able to focus on my acting.

Risk: I will revel in the rare opportunity to story tell on wheels! When else will I have this opportunity? What joy can I find in these scenes that I would not have tapped into on two feet?

Friday, February 22nd - Insights from a Drag King

I just had a wonderfully enlightening meeting with drag king Titus Androgynous about male physicality. What is fascinating is how much the male physicality for the role of Orlando plays right into many of my greatest challenges - inhabiting power, taking up space, and living without fear.

Insight on Male Physicality from Titus:

- Chest and shoulders at their full expansion and power
- Voice reverberating in the chest in a satisfying, powerful way
- Much less vulnerability/cannot expose heart
- People coming into my space a challenge
- Legs for Orlando are an extension of his manhood and strength
- Thinking of my breasts as my pecks
- A sense of armour

- Walking from heel to toe, rolling through, not too fast not too slow
- Shoes offer an extension of structure and power
- Arms - not closing off the body, open and ready to throw a punch/grab a sword/shake a hand - whereas women, especially from previous centuries, have upper arms close to the body, movement from elbow down, hands together above the cage of a dress
- Sitting - legs spread, awareness of male appendage
- Allowed to touch my chest - less protective and careful with body, a sense of enjoyment and freedom, females tend to be much more constrictive
- Men can take on broody, angry expressions often without worrying about it at all - when contending with an object that is confusing they can be full of visible scorn for it in their face, whereas women convey more calm and patience with things
- For male and female physicality from centuries past watch *The Favourite* and *Dangerous Liaisons*. Watch videos of Silverback Gorillas for male dominance and taking up space

Wednesday, February 27th - Technical Discipline

A few weeks ago I had been wondering if discipline was really the right focus for my thesis, as I'm sure many of us examining our artistic challenges feel we have a few to choose from, but lately I've been astounded at how utterly necessary discipline is for this particular show.

In this production I have five quick changes (three of which happen right on stage, in the midst of my lines); I am engaged in numerous moments of fight choreography; I dive into intimacy choreo with five separate actors in the cast; at one point in the play I dance very nearly naked; and I skate on rollerblades for much of Act 1. I really want to keep Orlando's shift from male to

female, his inhabiting five different centuries, and a depth of performance at the forefront of my mind, but it can be challenging with all there is to do.

Before starting rehearsals I had a plans to do push-ups, and sit-ups, and run...but what is demanding my focus with regards to discipline is practicing skating, the many quick changes, the movement with text sequence on the boat, continuing to drill the script and mine the intentions in each scene. Approaching all these tasks with a focus on discipline will hopefully keep me afloat.

Wednesday, March 6th - Discouraged On Deck

This show. This show is kicking my ass. I have never done a show with more technical choreography in my life—which fits perfectly with my artistic challenge—but it also currently has me up against the ropes. I want to give my focus to the storytelling, to the male versus female physicality, or even just to my lines, but all that is currently trumped by all the technical choreo that I need to get down.

I feel I am skewing towards a fixed mindset these days in rehearsal and I am eager to find my way back into a growth mindset. At the moment I feel compelled towards simplification. I want to pair everything down into doable, repeatable actions that I can master early enough so I can focus more fully on my acting, my relationships and (on a basic level) my lines. I think a daily routine of repeating my technical tasks will help them feel more possible and easy...I just don't know if there is time to run them all each day in rehearsal.

Thursday, March 14th - Diving Deeper into the Text

With the intention of giving more focus to the text, I have been re-reading Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* to mine for more specific details around certain moments in the play. I feel very fortunate to have Woolf's gorgeous words to bring more dimension and backstory to Ruhl's adaptation. My focus in rehearsal has been so utterly technical that I feel a strong need for filling out Orlando's world more. I have added excerpts from the book to pages of my script to give a greater depth of context to Orlando's inner world and relationships. Some favourite quotes that helped colour my sense of Orlando's world include:

On Orlando's love of solitude: "Orlando naturally loved solitary places, vast views, and to feel himself for ever and ever alone" (6).

On Orlando's poetry: "How odd it was...that this fine fellow with all his faculties about him and a healthy body—a man who never thought twice about heading to a charge or fighting a duel—should be so subject to the lethargy of thought...that when it came to question of poetry, or his own competence in it, he was as shy as a little girl behind her mother's cottage door" (62).

On Orlando's resolve to write: "Bad, good, or indifferent, I'll write from this day forward, to please myself" (62)

On Orlando's relationship with Sasha: "What then did she hide from him?...The agony would seize him suddenly...she did not know how to quiet him. Perhaps she did not want to quiet him; perhaps his rages pleased her and she provoked them purposely" (26).

On Orlando's relationship to the rooms in her home: "They had known each other for close on four centuries now. They had nothing to conceal. She knew their sorrows and joys...she had hidden nothing from them; had come to them as boy and woman, crying and dancing, brooding and gay" (206)

Tuesday, March 19th - Meditation

Tomorrow we go on deck for our tech dress. Meditating has become an important means of grounding and survival for me in this process. Tonight we ran all the wardrobe changes with the actual costume pieces for the first time and it took the full 4 hours of rehearsal...there are just

that many changes and executing them in a way that is visually interesting is just that complicated.

Meditation has become a daily space in which I try to quiet my thoughts, my problem-solving, and my concerns, and I am very grateful for the simple balm it provides to my busy mind.

Wednesday, March 27 - Opening Night

Last night we opened Orlando. There are a number of elements I have held strong to in this process toward grounding, but a few things have yet to be consistently integrated in my routines.

I have been devoted to meditation every morning as a means to calm, ground, and find resilience. I have continued to drink very rarely, and to drink green smoothies...which has potentially had an important side effect in my search for resilience...in the past I have typically found I am fighting a cold right before the show, but so far I seem to be healthy.

Yesterday I was really emotional about something that causes me deep pain, but also serious embarrassment. I am almost reluctant to write about it, as I consider myself a human with heart and depth, and I wish I was above the particular pain I was going through yesterday.

We were sent a link to the photos from dress rehearsal and asked to look through them all for any photos we did not want made public. As I know I struggle with looking at pictures of myself—particularly in a show when most shots seem to capture one mid-sentence—I was reluctant to look at them. I did not want it to shift my focus away from the show. However, since I simulate

being naked in this show, I thought it important to have a look and strike certain photos from being shared publicly.

I definitely wish I had not looked at them. Seeing shots of myself in a show can tend to sink me down into darkness. It seems so trivial and ridiculous, but it ignites a deep-rooted shame that has been with me a long time. It sounds so silly, but I have felt, for as long as I can remember, that I look “wrong”. I joked to my friend before opening yesterday that I have always felt “unacceptable in the face”.

Shame around my appearance often comes up for me when I do shows. I felt most free on stage when I played a young woman who suffered severe brain trauma in the play *Wild Dogs*. When I have been cast as romantic roles, like Juliet, I’ve felt haunted by whether I was pretty enough to be “worthy” of the audience’s attention.

The photos really set off a wellspring of physical shame and my mind was not in the right place the day leading into opening. I meditated as usual, I did yoga that was centred on grounding, but found myself in tears as I moved through the poses. I got to York and was still fighting back tears. I talked to my brother and he empathized deeply. He said he has had bouts of feeling the exact same thing and that he feels it could have something to do with our upbringing. After conveying how much he related to my struggle, he reminded me to go do this show with a focus on performing for the girl who dropped her life to come and finally get the MFA in Acting that she has wanted for so long.

I did just that and the opening of Orlando went quite well. I lost the thread of a line while in the midst of the choreography on the ship, but I used the interoception lens of the Batdorf Technique and focused on the physical sensation of my scene partner's arms around me as a means to become more present in the moment, which was helpful in getting back on track.

With regards to my panic from the photos, I am throwing this issue into the Reframe-Routine-Risk framework to come up with ways to combat it in the future:

Reframe: It is very likely that I am seeing these images and myself with a skewed perspective. Upon further exposure to the images the intensity of the feelings diminished somewhat. Also, as a person who sees all humans as beautiful I will reframe my perspective of the audience to endow them with the same open-hearted perspective.

Routine: In the future I will avoid seeing any photos of the production while still in the run of a show. I will ask that whoever is selecting photos for publication just make sure my face is not contorted mid-sentence, or ask them to show me the selection of photos they like and want to share. This will keep me focused on the show.

Risk: Even if I was a hideous monster, would that stop me from wanting to play this role and give it my all? No! I will remember to revel in the risk of not caring whether the audience finds me attractive enough and live more fully in the story and character.

Saturday, March 31st - After Closing Orlando

We closed Orlando yesterday afternoon. The show went smoothly and after getting a few runs in we are working with a stronger sense of unity, rhythm, and pace.

I am quite exhausted. Working on this show has been such an incredible experience and it has forced me to do things on stage that I feared. I am at once grateful to have had such a fascinating, multi-faceted role to take on for my thesis, and feeling ready to close the show.

It's incredible how much the technical juggling of this show has penetrated my subconscious. For the past month I have had numerous weekly dreams that resulted in talking and walking in my sleep, thinking I am in the show, naked on stage, or totally lost as to what comes next.

I have had moments of feeling overwhelmed in this process but I have learned important ways to cope with anxiety. I am curious and excited about continuing to approach whatever triggers my anxiety with my system of Reframe-Routine-Risk. How can I reframe the situation with a focus on empowerment and growth? How can I create a routine to conquer a challenge through consistent practice? How can I embrace risk in order to transform an obstacle from anxiety-inducing into a thrilling dare? I believe patience with myself is key to making real progress with my artistic challenge. Patience and peacefulness are the pillars to resilience.

I feel proud of the resilience and drive I have found while working on this wild, ambitious production of *Orlando*. As with facing any challenge, the rewards and lessons I am carrying away after confronting my artistic challenge are significant and this experience will certainly fuel a continued pursuit of a growth mindset, a passionate practice of routine, and a hunger for daring and discipline that defies resistance.

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Appendix: Notes from Actor's Script

Woolf re: Orlando + Sasha wanting to escape court:
 "Each increasingly desired the other's company in privacy all day long where there were none to marvel or to stare." (23)

Objective:
 To hold onto Sasha by any means necessary

Obstacle:
 She hates court, she seems to always hide a secret, she always seems to have the upper hand

Skate around riser

INTIMACY NOTES

- keep arms strong + rigid
- fuel lust into "delights of love"
- male vocalization
- coming out of it, stay in kneel as she sinks down
- following dialogue is in that place of post-hook up energy.

to serve.

ORLANDO

The Tower, the Beefeaters, the jeweler's shops, the theaters...

SASHA

Ah! Yes. I would like to see your London.

ORLANDO AND SASHA

So they skated to London on the frozen Thames. They got further and further away from Court.

The sound of skates scraping against ice.

ORLANDO

Hot with skating...

SASHA

And with love...

ORLANDO

They would throw themselves down on a solitary place...

SASHA

Wrapped in a great fur cloak...

ORLANDO

Orlando would take her in his arms and know...

SASHA

For the first time...

ORLANDO

The delights of love.

They kiss, wrapped in a great fur cloak.

SASHA

Then, they would speak of everything under the sun.

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to denounce

to reveal

to invite

to possess

to envelop

skate under rope

brace Sasha and allow her to kneel first join her

settle down together

From Woolf's Orlando:
 "[Orlando thought only] of his jewel; of her rarity; of means for making her irrevocably and indissolubly his own." (26)

TRANSFORMATION METAPHOR

EMPTINESS PLAYFULNESS

Supersize me - Go through the ages - YouTube

Ruhl's Rules on Narration

- Simplicity
- Emotional statedness - is it matching or juxtaposed, not a neutral tone. You have stake in what is happening
- Non-literality, non-illustration - no need to always match action to narrative.
- Flux - nature of narration will change moment to moment
- Narration invites in the audience rather than distancing them.

Create image collection of imagery I speak of.

Elizabethan 16/17 c

Fire Colonization
Violence POWER
Primal SURVIVAL
Reds
Golds

meet the Queen
Come to court
Sexuality awakened
Fall in love with Sasha
Plan to elope
She abandons me
Heartbroken
Constantinople

Transformation!
(sweeping arcs)

The 18th C

Baroque
Drama + Grandeur
Rococo (1720-1780)
Ornamental
Theatrical
Extravagance
Pastels (movement in painting)

Trills + Ruffles
white wigs
Age of Enlightenment
Century of Philosophy

living as a woman + the
difficulties that brings
Archduke + escaping him

20th C

- yellow of light
- gray of shadows
- immediacy
- incompleteness b/c of speed
- all at fingertips
- rush
- cookie utter repeatability

The 19th C

Respectability
Family
White wedding gowns
Black mourning
Moralistic Values
Separate Spheres
for Genders
Fertility

wedding ring crisis
meet Maximaduke

(restricted, conservative
squares?)

MORALS NESTING

SPEED

(speed, tight)

✦ SARAH RUHL ✦

I want to go home.

ORLANDO

— to mobilize

To England.

The sound of water. Intermission.

Objective: to fully assess what it is to live as a woman in society, to pass, to make the most of my new gender

Act III: The Eighteenth Century

TRYING TO PASS

Discoveries

Scene 1: Orlando Sails Back to England.

Orlando appears on the deck of a ship, wearing a huge, confining, elaborate dress and hat.

The sound of a boat rocking in water.

ORLANDO

Orlando bought herself a complete outfit of such clothes as women then wore, and it was in just such a dress that she now stood on the deck of a ship heading towards England. It is a strange fact, but a true one, that up to this moment she had scarcely given her sex a thought. It was not until she felt the coil of skirts about her legs and the captain offered—

CAPTAIN

May I get a chair for you, madam?

ORLANDO

Oh! Yes, please.

(Orlando rehearses the phrase "Yes, please" in varied tones, from "masculine" to "feminine") Yes, please.

three times →

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to trick
to command
to pet

overly feminine
overly masculine
then middle ground

Obstacle: The huge challenge of moving in women's clothing, the way I am treated by society, I am no longer able to use male tactics to introduce

chorus will dress me

react to the foreignness of what I am wearing

act this part on ship to get through but once home can be myself.

take on
pantomime
feminine
pose
and hold

✦ SARAH RUHL ✦

(To the frozen captain)

D'you take sugar? D'you take cream?

how do I ask this?

CHORUS

And here she seemed to criticize both sexes equally, as if she belonged to neither.

I AM BOTH

ORLANDO

She was a man, she was a woman—

She knew the secrets and shared the weaknesses of each.

The figure of Sasha walks past.

ORLANDO

Oh! At last I know Sasha as she really was!

Sawsha

CHORUS

For, though Orlando herself was a woman, it was still a woman that she loved.

ORLANDO

And now a thousand mysteries became plain to her.

CHORUS

Her affection gained in beauty what it lost in falsity.

Sawsha!

ORLANDO

Sasha! On legs like beech trees, grape clustered, pearl hung!

Which is the greater ecstasy? The man's or the woman's?

¹to implore
Sasha retreats.

ORLANDO

Don't go! I have much to tell you! And much to ask!

Sasha disappears. The captain puts his arm around Orlando.

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From Woolf's
Orlando:

"Better be quit of martial ambition, the love of power, and all other manly desires if one can more fully enjoy the most exalted raptures known to the human spirit - contemplation, solitude, to ... Praise God that I am a woman!" (102-103)

Keep physical distance from Sasha - admire her, but don't get too close as it will burst the illusion/memory

Chronos → Inspiration, Nature, the gentle satire of humanity,
beyond categorization

5 key emotions in the play

Searching for self - through adventures, love, status, poetry, sex
 Loss - broken heartedness, loss of status, loss of manhood
 Feeling out of place - seeking - feeling incomplete, out of step
 Loneliness
 Love - self-love - self-acceptance

Relationships

Queen - Gateway, Guardian, mirror (man in woman's body)

3 women - sexual awareness/hunger

Sasha - first love, tormentor, best friend, ghost that haunts me.

Archduchess/duke - a claustrophobic room I want to escape, provokes lust
and idea of settling against my heart, which disgusts me

Captain - first taste of the power, pleasure and punishment of being a woman

Grismelda - home, family, parental figure

Popper - home, family

Marmaduke - true love, allowance to be many things, hope and
happiness, continued individuality

To Win

Act I - to truly feel, find love, to write, to move up in court, to gain experiences
to experience

Act II - to escape, both myself, women and the Archduchess to escape

Act III - to find home in my new persona, to still connect to a sense of self,
to trick society / the spirit of the age to fit in

Act IV - to fully see and be seen w Marmaduke to fully fall in love + expose

Act V - to locate my true self to find myself