



# EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN!

SCREENPLAY BY  
ROGER TUCKER

FROM THE NOVEL BY  
COMPTON MACKENZIE



# EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN!

a screenplay by Roger Tucker

A group of women meet on the Isle of Serensi to pursue a life of love and art quite independent of men. What results is a bright comedy of sexual snakes and ladders.

The story is set during the closing days of the First World War, while all the able-bodied men are away. Those that remain on the island – the leather skinned women porters, the bent old musicians, the blind doctor, the crippled lace-maker, and hordes of bare-foot young boys are witness to the amorous and bitter intrigues of women, the like of which they have never seen before.

Among them is Rosalba, with her jade cigarette holder and slim ebony stick; Rory, puffing a cigar and dragging her bulldogs behind her; and Olimpia, darling of the avant garde, with a “devil may care” attitude that strikes fear into the hearts of men and women alike.

The novel, *Extraordinary Women: Theme & Variation*, by Compton MacKenzie, on which the film is based, was the first to be published in English which dealt openly with lesbianism – Radclyff Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, having previously been banned. But the women's sexuality in the book is simply accepted for just what it is — which gives it a startlingly modern air.

The novel was, in fact, a *roman à clef* about real women of the time:

“I painted portraits of one after another of the Capri characters I knew, and almost without exception they looked and behaved exactly as I made them look and behave.”

### Rosalba

[modelled on Mimi Franchetti - international flirt - Swiss/Italian]

24 years old – who vows by hook or by crook to live life to the hilt before losing her youth – the epitome of the “new woman”

“ . . . her short accordion-pleated skirt made the long-skirted bourgeois of Lucerne shudder and crick their necks to stare after her rifle-green jacket and waistcoat, her double collar and black satin tie with the coral pin, her long jade cigarette holder and slim ebony stick, and that rippling hair, lustrous and hatless.”

### Rory (Aurora) Freemantle

[modelled on Radclyff Hall – author of *The Well of Loneliness* – British]

Cigar-smoking promoter of female boxing, breeder of French bulldogs, and imagist poet

“ . . . she came down to dinner at the Augusto in a good imitation of a dinner-jacket, though without the stiff-fronted shirt which she would have liked to affect every night, but owing to the inconsiderate femininity of her bust, caused her so much discomfort that she could only affect it on the grandest of occasions.”

### Olimpia Leigh

[modelled on Romaine Brooks – painter – American]

Composer and painter; wrapped in a white vicuña cloak, maddeningly remote and provocative, expressing her opinions with a low, thrilling voice.

“ . . . for the first time, a woman complete in herself, isolated mentally and physically from the rest of her kind, independent in her judgements, accepting or rejecting as she pleased . . . To be loved by Olimpia Leigh, even for five minutes, gave any young woman a cachet not obtainable since the days when one could boast of having been loved by Sappho herself.”

### Cléo

[modelled on Renata Borgatti – concert pianist – French]

Undisciplined pianist and poseur, with a penchant for singing Wagner as she plays; likes the ribald company of men and treats women exactly as if she were one.

“ . . . her clothes are flung around her without any regard to the fashion of the moment. They are not really so much clothes as curtains hung up to exclude the night or let in the day as desired . . .”

## **Zoe**

[modelled on Dolly Wilde – diarist – American]  
Bi-sexual socialite, and married “lady”.

“ Nobody believed she was the wife of an ordinary man called Mitchell, a member of the great firm of jewellers; and it might have been difficult to believe she was his mistress without those prodigious square sapphires . . . ”

## **Lulu**

Ingenue – [French]

“ . . . she seemed standing there like one of those large and expensive china dolls who stare down from wide open blue eyes at some shiny-faced Dutch doll beside them in the toyshop window. Not that there was anything of the lifelessness of a doll about Lulu. ”

## **Miss Chimbley**

Lulu’s governess – [British]

“ *Cassis tutissima virtus*. How nice to have such a family motto ! *Virtue is the safest helmet*. She had never been false to that sentiment. ”

## **Daffodil**

Rory’s comforter – night-time transvestite – [Norwegian].

“ Daffodil was a young Norwegian whose real name was Krog – Hjalmar Krog; but as he did not in the least look like a person named Hjalmar Krog, we may as well forget that, and with everyone-else call him Daffodil. He had nothing of the modern girl about him; he was as delicately feminine as a keep-sake of fifty years ago. ”

## **Hermia**

Monocle wearing, man hating, mother of Lulu [Polish]

“ Even her hobbies sometimes provided more than idle diversion; as when the trumpets and tambourines of Eudoxia, the Greek medium, had to be rescued from the aspersions of male investigators, or Mrs. Rabjohn’s ectoplasm defended against attempted man-handling by the Society of Psychical research. ”



### Anastasia

Woman of the world, and happy cynic; having fallen on hard times, she works to make ends meet – [Russian]

“ . . . perhaps her own apparent freedom from any desire for man was due to a fear of shattering this illusion of other people in love. She was at once too wise and too sentimental to take the risk; but she was also too much of a voluptuary to remain entirely cold. So to herself she permitted sensation, but not emotion. To others she permitted anything. ”

### Janet

With the looks of a pre-Raphaelite muse – [British]

“ . . . in addition to being very intellectual, as Rosalba supposed, she was also extremely *chic*; this union of brains with a profile, an ivory complexion, a perfect figure, and a good dressmaker went as near to turning Rosalba's head as anything ever had. ”

### Fortunata, Caterina, Francesca

Rory's maids at the Villa Leucadia – [Italian]

“ . . . admittedly their technical accomplishment was not yet on a level with their appearance. There were three of them – Fortunata, Caterina, and Francesca — slim as gazelles with slanting Phoenician eyes-brows and cheeks of dusky rose. And since nobody is more tolerant of the whims of rich foreigners than the Sirenesi they did not in the least mind being dressed in scanty draperies of lemon and orange stencilled with gold. They did not in the least mind showing a great deal of their slim legs nor binding their hair with fillets . . . ”

# Extraordinary Women!

promises to be a decidedly not ordinary film.



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