

*The Florida Enchantment* ( 1914, Vitagraph Co.) 63 minutes.

**“For it was this mixture in her of man and woman, one being uppermost and then the other, that often gave her conduct an unexpected turn.”**

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

**Director:** Sidney Drew

**Writers:** Eugene Mullen & Marguerite Bertsch [?] from the 1891 novel and the 1896 play of the same title by Archibald Gunter & Fergus Redmond.

**Photographer:** Robert A. Stuart

**Cast:** Sidney Drew (Dr. Fred Cassadene), Edith Storey (Lilian Travers), Charles Kent (Major Horton), Jane Morrow (Bessie Horton, his daughter), Ada Gifford (Stella Lovejoy), Ethel Lloyd (Jane, Lilian’s maid), Grace Stevens (Constancia Oglethorpe), Lillian Burns (Malvina), Allan Campbell (Stockton Remington), Cortland Van Deusen (Charley Wilkes), Frank O’Neil (Gusavus Duncan, a hotel porter),

“This unusual fable about a woman who discovers magic seeds that transform women into men (and men into women), without altering their outward appearance too greatly, attracted some surprisingly vituperative reviews (“The picture should never have been put out,” pronounced *Variety*). Now, this gender-bending comedy of manners has a sharp modern edge.

As was often true of Vitagraph Company films, the style is simple but the acting superb. *A Florida Enchantment* was directed on locations around Ft. Lauderdale in April and May 1914 by Sidney Drew (1864-1919). Member of a theatrical dynasty (he was uncle of Ethel, Lionel, and John Barrymore), Drew also takes the lead in the film as “Dr. Cassadene,” whose inability to keep his hands off his beautiful patients leads his fiancée to resort to the seeds. The film-stealing performance is from the fiancée, played by Edith Storey (1892-1955), whose way of toying with gender-specific gestures still feels satirically accurate. Also in the cast is Lucille McVey (credited under her stage-name Jane Morrow), who married Sidney Drew in July 1914. As “Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew,” they performed on stage and screen a proto-screwball comedy of male/female domestic conflict, a comic style glimpsed too in this film’s quieter moments.

The casting is unfortunately more typical of the era in filling African American roles with white in blackface and in resorting to slapstick comedy among the black characters.”

[Film Notes from THE ORIGINS OF FILM dvd set. Library of Congress/Smithsonian]



**Additional reading:**

Brasell, R. Bruce, “A Seed for Change: The Engenderment of “A Florida Enchantment” *Cinema Journal*, 36:4. (Summer, 1997): 3-21.

Somerville, Sibhan B. “The Queer Career of Jim Crow: Racial and Sexual Transformation in *A Florida Enchantment*.” *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Ed., Diane Negra. Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press: 2002: 251-69.

“A Florida Enchantment,” *Variety*, August 14, 1914, 21.