

Film, 2006

(director Kenneth Branagh)



Rosalind, Orlando and the other forest exiles return to the palace (Act 5 Scene 4).

The location of this film version is 19th-century Japan, with the main characters members of an enclave of European traders. The film opens during a Noh performance which is dramatically interrupted by samurai warriors who proceed to drive Duke Senior and his followers from the palace and into the surrounding woods. Inevitably, the wrestling match between Orlando and Charles turns into a sumo contest. Once in the Forest of Arden, however, the atmosphere is essentially English with its lush images of greenery and cool blue skies.

Critics were generally impressed with the way Bryce Dallas Howard plays Rosalind, a character both complex and comic. ‘Rosalind, after all, is a woman who disguises herself as a man, then feigns portraying a woman. Howard manages it all, without seeming too boyish, too girlish or too artificial. And she does a lot of it in unbroken long takes’ (David Bianculli, *New York Daily News*, August 2007).

Branagh the director typically adopted a colour-blind approach to casting. Both Rosalind and Orlando and Celia and Oliver are mixed-race couples. Brian Blessed plays both royal dukes, switching disturbingly from psychotic Duke Frederick to wise and sensitive Duke Senior and back again. David Oyelowo makes a suitably charismatic Orlando, Romola Garai is charmingly melodramatic as Celia and Alfred Molina, sporting a haircut like something out of *Eraserhead*, genuinely entertaining as Touchstone. Kevin Kline as the philosophising Jaques delivers his ‘seven ages of man’ speech in a strikingly cinematic way; he sits still and lets the camera rotate all around him. The effect is mesmerising and powerfully theatrical.

The Epilogue is unusual and ingenious. Howard speaks Rosalind’s lines as she threads her way through the film set towards her trailer. She enters and closes the door, whereupon Branagh the director can be heard saying, ‘And ... cut!’

- 1 Review the images of this production and make notes on what *you* think audiences would enjoy about it.
- 2 Which of the above comments and descriptions have intrigued, inspired or annoyed you most, and why?