

Old Vic Theatre, 1989

(director Tim Albery)



Rosalind (as Ganymede) tries to rouse a disheartened Orlando (Act 5 Scene 2).

This production created a frighteningly harsh atmosphere for the opening court scenes: a windowless prison-like palace with blood-smearred walls, harsh lighting and deep black shadows. But there was very little comfort to be found in the forest either: 'Rather than a soul-healing Arcady, this Arden is a diorama in a provincial museum in the process of being dismantled – a stuffed midget stag, a few naked branches and three scrubby firs that Celia and Rosalind have a job concealing themselves behind' (Rhoda Koenig, *Punch*, June 1989).

There was nothing young, dewy-eyed or romantic about Fiona Shaw's intelligent but edgy Rosalind, and her intensely passionate relationship with Celia did not go down too well with some critics: 'In this most ambiguously sexual of all plays, Fiona Shaw too explicitly plays Rosalind as a woman, already greying, who has still not discovered her sexual orientation' (David Nathan, *Jewish Chronicle*, June 1989).

Adam Kotz as Orlando was 'a gentle and warm-blooded youth, angered above all by his brother's denial to him of an education in the learning of the world' (Michael Ratcliffe, *Observer*, May 1989). Helen Cooper was a very warm and selfless Celia, while Karl Johnson as Jaques expressed his melancholy in the huffiest of manners. Polly Walker was 'stunning as Phebe: a pouting nymphet who devours Ganymede with her eyes and only accepts Silvius with sullen truculence' (Michael Billington, *Guardian*, May 1989).

The finale was unusual to say the least. When a female Hymen rose from the pool holding an uprooted tree as a symbol of life, the symbolic significance was lost on at least one critic: 'The blindfolded Goddess of Marriage ... arrives clutching a tree as if she has been shopping at the local garden centre' (Maureen Paton, *Daily Express*, May 1989).

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