

Royal Shakespeare Company, 1985

(director Adrian Noble)



Rosalind (centre) is ardently pursued by Phebe (left) as Celia watches (Act 3 Scene 6).

In this production, Arden was a dream version of Duke Frederick's court, a forest of the mind. It had a large stopped clock, because time is suspended here, and the runaways arrived in Arden with an enormous white cloth billowing out behind them, which then completely blanked out all the court furniture. This Arden was a 'realm in which you make of life what you want to make of it; it's a realm where you can dress up and change your gender, change your way of life' (*Plays and Players*, May 1986).

Juliet Stevenson played Rosalind as a sharply intelligent woman 'who trembles at first sight of Orlando [but then] delightedly shuffles off her limiting female apparel to prove a manipulative, teasing and sexually curious young woman' (Suzie Mackenzie, *Time Out*, January 1986). Stevenson herself described *As You Like It* as a dangerous and subversive play that challenges our notions of gender. As Ganymede (see above centre) she was a boyish 'almost Chaplinesque figure in bowler, scarlet braces and baggy white pants' and Hilton McRae's Orlando exuded a similarly ambiguous sexuality, 'rather like an androgynous Scottish Mick Jagger' (*Guardian*, April 1985).

Alan Rickman played Jaques as a former libertine, arrogant and yet vulnerable, bitingly critical yet deeply dependent on the approval of others. Rickman said he saw the 'seven ages of man' speech as one in which Jaques comes very close to losing control. Fiona Shaw (pictured above right) was a strong, intelligent, gawky Celia, emotionally very close to Rosalind. Nicky Henson as Touchstone clowned everything up with a mixture of slapstick and music hall routines.

- 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?