

Royal Shakespeare Company, 1989–90

(director John Caird)



'I can live
no longer by
thinking' –
Orlando (Act 5
Scene 2, line 39).

For the opening court scenes, this production created a bleak 1930s Art Deco world very much in the style of the Stratford RSC theatre itself, right down to its giant foyer clock ticking out time in this 'real world'. After Rosalind and Celia escaped, Duke Frederick's armed fascist-style guards scoured the audience with their torches. When the play moved into the forest, the clock disappeared ('There's no clock in the forest' – Orlando, Act 3 Scene 3, lines 254–5) and areas of green appeared and spread, scene by scene, together with 'mists, bulrushes and a hovering cloud of butterflies – an idyll set amid the surrounding gloom' (Alastair Macaulay, *Financial Times*, April 1990).

Sophie Thompson (pictured above) was 'a witty and beguiling Rosalind who amusingly turns up as a forest Ganymede in baggy blue shorts and straw hat. She also escapes from the cliché that, in donning male attire, the character discovers her bi-sexuality: instead Ms Thompson makes the Shakespearian point that disguise releases Rosalind's femininity' (Michael Billington, *Guardian*, September 1989). Jerome Flynn as Orlando was very much the virile, clean-limbed hero unable to resist this Rosalind/Ganymede's teasing charms.

Gillian Bevan played Celia with a thoughtful melancholy, displaying first 'a silent frustrated love for Orlando, which she transfers fleetingly to Silvius, before love at first sight with Oliver' (Alastair Macaulay, *Financial Times*, April 1990). Mark Williams was a 'sour, red-headed Touchstone, an alternative comedian before his time' (Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, April 1990), while Hugh Ross as Jaques stalked 'the bucolic retreat like an enigmatic shadow, casting his melancholic eye over events with all the ironic scepticism of a death figure – hauntingly departing through an upstage door which spills a sudden shaft of bright white light on to the black stage' (Irving Wardle, *Independent on Sunday*, April 1990).

- 1 Study the image from this production. In what ways do you consider these actors well cast for the roles of Rosalind and Orlando?
- 2 Which of the above comments and descriptions have intrigued, inspired or annoyed you most, and why?