

Royal Shakespeare Company, 1996

(director Steven Pimlott)



A corrosively funny Glaswegian Touchstone (left), played by David Tennant, debates with Corin in Act 3 Scene 3.

The opening scenes for this production took place in a harsh stainless steel box which was transformed by sympathetic lighting and a forest of silvery birch poles into a surprisingly effective forest: ‘the stark, simple design reminds us that Arden is as much a state of mind as a place and contributes a strange dreamlike atmosphere’ (Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, April 1996). Caught in a whirling snowstorm, this Forest of Arden was at first a harsh and wintry place, where Jaques delivered his ‘seven ages of man’ speech only to discover that old Adam had quietly breathed his last. His freshly dug grave, decorated with daffodils, dominated the stage throughout the second half.

Niamh Cusack as Rosalind was ‘graceful, bitten not by a “comedy bug” but by the discovery of her true vocation as a counsellor. She is the sweetest, and most unselfconsciously sexy, Rosalind in ages’ (Michael Coveney, *Observer*, April 1996). Some critics, however, felt that Liam Cunningham as Orlando was a little too mature and knowing ‘for a character whose youth and inexperience are a popular topic of conversation within the play’ (Robert Hanks, *Evening Standard*, October 1996).

David Tennant (pictured above) was a genuinely funny Touchstone, a manic depressive who delighted in doing verbal battle with the likes of Corin, Jaques and William, the last of whom headbutted him for pinching his beloved Audrey from him. Robert Demeger played the exiled Duke Senior in his first forest scene, ‘sounding and looking like a bedraggled scoutmaster doggedly cheering up a troop shuffling miserably in the pelting snow’ (Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, April 1996), while John Woodvine delivered Jaques’ observations ‘with lugubrious authority’ (Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, April 1996).

- 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?