A334_1

Reading Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

About this free course

This free course is an adapted extract from the Open University course A334 *English Literature from Shakespeare to Austen*:www.open.ac.uk/courses/modules/a334.

This version of the content may include video, images and interactive content that may not be optimised for your device.

You can experience this free course as it was originally designed on OpenLearn, the home of free learning from The Open University.

www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/reading-shakespeares-you-it/content-section-0

There you'll also be able to track your progress via your activity record, which you can use to demonstrate your learning.

Copyright © 2018 The Open University

Intellectual property

Unless otherwise stated, this resource is released under the terms of the Creative Commons Licence v4.0 http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en_GB. Within that The Open University interprets this licence in the following way: www.open.edu/openlearn/about-openlearn/frequently-asked-questions-on-openlearn. Copyright and rights falling outside the terms of the Creative Commons Licence are retained or controlled by The Open University. Please read the full text before using any of the content.

We believe the primary barrier to accessing high-quality educational experiences is cost, which is why we aim to publish as much free content as possible under an open licence. If it proves difficult to release content under our preferred Creative Commons licence (e.g. because we can't afford or gain the clearances or find suitable alternatives), we will still release the materials for free under a personal end-user licence.

This is because the learning experience will always be the same high quality offering and that should always be seen as positive – even if at times the licensing is different to Creative Commons.

When using the content you must attribute us (The Open University) (the OU) and any identified author in accordance with the terms of the Creative Commons Licence.

The Acknowledgements section is used to list, amongst other things, third party (Proprietary), licensed content which is not subject to Creative Commons licensing. Proprietary content must be used (retained) intact and in context to the content at all times.

The Acknowledgements section is also used to bring to your attention any other Special Restrictions which may apply to the content. For example there may be times when the Creative Commons Non-Commercial Sharealike licence does not apply to any of the content even if owned by us (The Open University). In these instances, unless stated otherwise, the content may be used for personal and non-commercial use.

We have also identified as Proprietary other material included in the content which is not subject to Creative Commons Licence. These are OU logos, trading names and may extend to certain photographic and video images and sound recordings and any other material as may be brought to your attention.

Unauthorised use of any of the content may constitute a breach of the terms and conditions and/or intellectual property laws.

We reserve the right to alter, amend or bring to an end any terms and conditions provided here without notice.

All rights falling outside the terms of the Creative Commons licence are retained or controlled by The Open University.

Head of Intellectual Property, The Open University

978-1-4730-2597-4 (.kdl)
978-1-4730-2598-1 (.epub)

Contents

Introduction

As You Like It is widely regarded as one of Shakespeare's comic masterpieces. It is a mature work, probably written after two of his best-known plays, *Henry V* and *Julius Caesar*, and immediately before another, *Hamlet*. The play is set in two quite distinct worlds – a corrupt ducal court and the pastoral Forest of Arden – and the play's protagonist is one of Shakespeare's best-loved characters, Rosalind, a duke's daughter who notoriously spends most of the time in the play disguised as a man. The play is rich in dramatic roles, is inventive in its use of genre and language and contains some of Shakespeare's most familiar lines. In this free course, *Reading Shakespeare's* As You Like It, you will explore the liveliness of Shakespeare's writing by looking at three short sections from the play (including the famous 'All the world's a stage' speech) and a full-length scene. You will find explanations of terms **in bold** in the Glossary at the end of this course.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course A334 *English literature from Shakespeare to Austen*.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of some of the key speeches and scenes in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*
- appreciate the importance and complexity of role-play in *As You Like It*
- appreciate the varied uses of language in a Shakespearean play.

1 Opinions about *As You Like It*

The poet W. H. Auden declared that 'Of all Shakespeare's plays, *As You Like It* is the greatest paean to civilization', singling out Rosalind as 'a triumph of civilization' (Auden, 2002, p. 149). One modern editor of the play, Juliet Dusinberre, praises the 'phenomenal riches' of its language; another, Michael Hattaway, stresses *As You Like It*'s complexity, arguing that it is full of 'paradoxes and contradictions that can be turned into a multitude of coexistent interpretations' (Shakespeare, 2009, p. 4; Shakespeare, 2006, p. 1). The critic Stephen Greenblatt describes it as one of Shakespeare's 'sunniest' comedies (Greenblatt, 2005, p. 290). More elaborately, C. L. Barber calls it 'the most perfect expression Shakespeare or anyone else achieved' of the traditional 'rhythms of life' and of the contrast between the holiday and the everyday (Barber, 1972 [1959], p. 238).

Not everyone has been so positive. Frank Kermode thinks that 'more than most of Shakespeare *As You Like It* has slipped over our horizon; it has too much to say about what was once intimately interesting and now is not' (Kermode, 2001, p. 82). James Shapiro notes that none of Shakespeare's contemporaries is known to have praised the play and speculates that this may have been because 'it was not only of its time but also ahead of it' in the unusual demands it made of its audiences: it is dominated by long conversations about the nature of love and **pastoral** characters; it can be said to lack an overtly exciting plot or even 'drama' in the conventional sense of the word (Shapiro, 2005, p. 229).

Following this brief course might not lead you to endorse fully any of these views. It will, however, help you take a well-informed view of them. When you have worked through the material that follows, and analysed a sequence of key moments from the play, you might like to return to this opening section and reconsider the opinions of Auden, Dusinberre and the rest in the light of what you have learned.

2 Getting to know the play

In this section, you will get to grips with three of the most striking moments in *As You Like It*. None of these extracts features any of the 'major' characters in the play – the lovers Orlando and Rosalind, or Rosalind's friend and cousin, Celia – and none of them involves an important turning point in the plot. Taken together, however, they are representative of the exciting variety of Shakespeare's writing in this highly entertaining comedy. The activities in this section allow you to experience this variety.

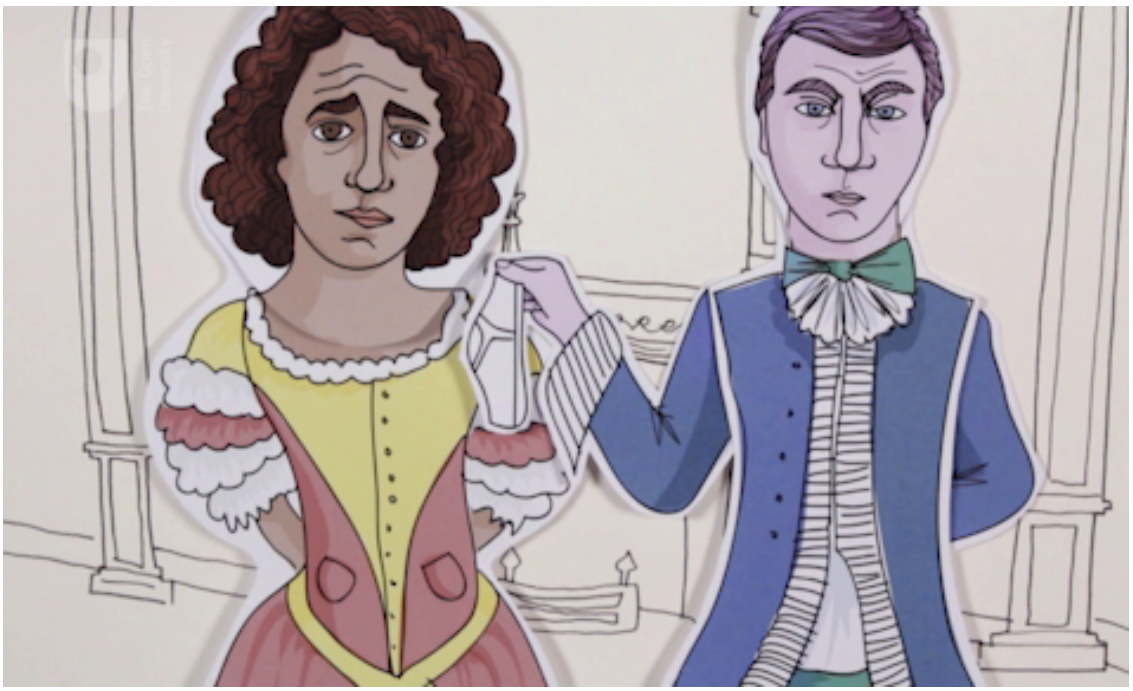
As the context of each of these three sections of text will be explained, it will not be essential for you to read the whole play. If you do have time to read it in full, however, you will find the discussion that follows more valuable – and you should find it a very enjoyable experience! There are many free editions of *As You Like It* on the internet. In this course, we will be quoting from and using act and scene numbers from the modernised text on the excellent Internet Shakespeare Editions website. (If you already have a copy of *As You Like It*, you may find that the act and scene numbers quoted here differ from those in your copy.)

As You Like It is a relatively short play and tells an engaging story. Here are some tips to bear in mind as you read it – whether the whole text or just the extracts included in the discussion below.

- You will enjoy the experience more if you do not worry at first about understanding all the text's ins and outs: try to concentrate on getting the gist of what is going on. For each passage, numbered footnotes have been added to the text to explain unusual words or references; the footnotes can be accessed via a PDF file, which is linked to in the introductory paragraph of each of the passages . It's a good idea, however, to see how far you can get by without looking at the notes. As you continue to read, you will develop your own way of moving between the text and the notes. (You might, for example, refer to the notes after reading a sentence or a paragraph.)
- You will find some passages easier to follow than the others. At some points, you might have to stop and work through the sentence slowly, a word at a time, referring to the notes. At other points, you will be able to 'go with the flow'.
- Remember, you are reading dialogue – that Shakespeare's characters are people speaking with each other. If you find some sentence difficult to understand, it will often help to look back at what another character has just said. Is the speaker whose sentence you find difficult to comprehend agreeing with the previous speaker? Disagreeing with them? Making fun of them? Changing the subject? Humorously pretending to disgaree with them?
- It is a good idea (particularly if you are reading in a private place!) to speak out loud at least some of the lines, as you read. To help understand a difficult passage, it is sometimes better to read that passage out loud in a number of exaggeratedly different ways

- In this course, you will be asked occasionally to write notes about the bits of the play that you read. It will be tempting to skip these bits, and simply read the whole course through. This would be a mistake, though: making notes on what you've read will help you clarify what you think about it, and will therefore make it much easier for you to understand the play.

Before you begin reading, have a look at the very short video below, a jokey introduction to Shakespearean comedy narrated by the comedian Josie Long. When a play like *As You Like It* is referred to as a 'comedy', the word is being used in a slightly different way from most twenty-first-century uses of the word. Watching the video will give you a quick idea of the sort of comedy *As You Like It* is, and will give you some ideas to think about as you delve into the play.



Let's now explore the play, by looking at three passages from it. Each of the extracts will be preceded by a question for you to think about while reading. Bearing the question in mind, and taking rough notes as you go along, is an excellent way to focus your thoughts. Don't worry if your responses to the questions are different from the discussions that follow each extract. One of the things that makes the study of English literature so exciting is the difference that exists between different readers' views of the same text. Language as rich as Shakespeare's, in particular, conjures up a very wide range of opinions and ideas. The questions seem straightforward, but in fact raise many complex issues which don't admit of easy solutions.

The three sections of the play discussed on the next page are as follows:

- Jaques's 'All the world's a stage' speech (Act 2, Scene 7)
- The dialogue between Corin and Touchstone (Act 3, Scene 2)
- The entrance of Hymen in the final scene (Act 5, Scene 4).

Let's now read those three passages.

2.1 Passage 1: ‘All the world’s a stage’

In the first activity, you will be digging into the details of one of the most famous passages in all of world literature: the ‘Seven Ages of Man’ speech, with its celebrated opening line ‘All the world’s a stage’. You will be using your initial response to the speech as a starting point for detailed critical analysis.

Activity 1

Read the passage below, the ‘All the world’s a stage’ speech from Act 2, Scene 7 of the play. The numbered footnotes in the extract below can be accessed by clicking here: Passage 1 footnotes. If you would like to view text and footnotes together, you can do so on the Internet Shakespeare Editions website (lines 1118–1145, with notes indicated by the green underlining).

These lines, some of the most famous ever written by Shakespeare, are delivered in *As You Like It* by a cynical courtier, Jaques. Jaques has fled into the Forest of Arden with his master, Duke Senior, after the overthrow of Senior by his villainous brother Frederick. Immediately before this speech, Orlando, the hero of *As You Like It*, has interrupted the good old Duke and his courtiers at their forest meal. Orlando himself has just been banished by Duke Frederick, and he and his companion, the old servant Adam, are starving and desperate for help. As Orlando goes off to fetch Adam, the Duke points out to Jaques that the arrival of Adam and Orlando has shown that other people are as unfortunate as themselves:

> Thou see’st we are not all alone unhappy:
>
> This wide and universal theatre
>
> Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
>
> Wherein we play in.

This theatrical **metaphor** prompts the glorious set-piece speech from Jaques that follows. As you read the speech, think about the following question:

Can you characterise the overall tone of this speech? Is it jokey? Or serious? Or both? What details in the speech would you say have contributed to this tone?

When you have finished, click ‘Reveal discussion’.

> JAQUES
>
> All the world’s a stage,
>
> And all the men and women merely players.
>
> They have their exits and their entrances,
>
> And one man in his time plays many parts,
>
> His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,

Mewling[1] and puking in the nurse's arms.
Then the whining schoolboy with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard[2],
Jealous in honour[3], sudden[4], and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice[5],
In fair round belly with good capon[6] lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws[7] and modern instances[8];
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon[9],
With spectacles on nose and pouch[10] on side,
His youthful hose[11], well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank[12]; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes[13]
And whistles in his[14] sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history[15],
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans[16] teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Discussion

This is certainly the play's most quoted moment. The idea of the world being like a stage has numerous sources (as you will see if you have a look at the Internet Shakespeare note on this speech); it may also be that Shakespeare is in part defending his own craft of acting against **Puritan** objections to the theatre as a place of immorality by highlighting the universal nature of acting and role-play.

The dramatic context is a serious one: you will remember that the occasion for the speech is the Duke's observation that there are many 'woeful pageants' in the world. There are light moments in Jaques's speech, however. There is an amusing contrast between the snail-like schoolboy's 'whining' as he goes 'Unwillingly to school' and his scrubbed-up 'shining' face (a contrast highlighted by the rhyme), while the lover certainly seems a comical figure, with his '*woeful* ballad/Made to his mistress' *eyebrow*'. What could be sillier than writing love poems to an *eyebrow*? (We find out a little

bit later on in *As You Like It* when we hear the trite love poems that Orlando writes to Rosalind [Act 3, Scene 2].) The dominant tone, however, is sharply critical: Jaques seems to unpick the pretentions of all seven of the 'ages of man' that feature in the speech and hold them up to ridicule. Much of the time he focuses on appearances: the beards of the soldier and the justice and the ludicrously enormous trousers of the old man (the 'pantaloon'), carefully and uselessly kept since youth. The futile martial 'reputation' that means so much to the soldier is dismissed by being compared with an evanescent 'bubble' disappearing as it swells. Throughout, Jaques is a sceptical observer, looking scornfully on an absurd set of figures as if a spectator at a play. The one reference to theatrical matters in the main body of the speech is telling: 'And so he plays his part' follows on immediately from the evocation of a supposedly wise, settled middle-aged man, the justice. Jaques undermines the justice's 'eyes severe' and 'wise saws' by describing them simply as 'his part'. Earlier on, in Act 2, Scene 1, Jaques's employer, the good old Duke, has been full of wise sayings, minting moral insights from his group's isolation in the forest: 'this our life', he says, 'exempt from public haunt [cut off from the crowds] / Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones, and good in everything'. Is Jaques implicitly criticising the Duke here? And himself? What is 'All's the world's stage' but a collection of wise sayings and examples?

Jaques's cynical approach owes much to contemporary verse **satire**, a **genre** which was so controversial in Shakespeare's day that in June 1599, very close in time to the first performances of *As You Like It*, the Archbishop of Canterbury ordered that a list of nine books of this sort be censored: seven were burned. Elizabethan society was, like the wicked Duke Frederick's **court**, authoritarian. It tried to control what people read and so what they might think; in such contexts, writing satire could easily land the unwary writer in trouble.

The grimmest part of Jaques's speech is the seventh age, with its depiction of senility as a gradual withdrawal from all the good things in human life: it is 'second childishness and mere oblivion,/Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything'. What's noticeable here is that we have moved away from the vivid pictures – the spectators' views – that characterise the rest of the speech. Instead, the focus is on the perceptions (taste, sight) of the individual scrutinised, or, more accurately, its absence. We have moved away from physical appearance into nothingness. Overall, Jaques offers a sombre, perhaps even a tragic, vision, and hints at the potential seriousness of the play we are studying.

The play as a whole invites us to consider Jaques on a number of levels. On the one hand, as the moralist of this 'All the world's a stage' speech (and of others), he is a self-conscious outsider, who frequently appears ridiculous in the theatre. His name was possibly pronounced 'jakes', which would have made a pun on the Elizabethan slang for 'toilet' (Shakespeare, 2009, pp. 87–8). In this spirit, the critic C. L. Barber views him as a character who is designed to stand outside society: 'Jaques' factitious melancholy [. . .] serves primarily to set him at odds both with society and with Arden and so motivate contemplative mockery' (Barber, 1972 [1959], p. 228). He is a figure of fun *because* he is an outsider. On the other hand, at key moments, he offers a provocative counterpoint to the conventions of love. Towards the end

of the play, as the lovers all pair off and head for marriage, Jaques, in love with nobody, unpartnered, bids farewell to everyone else on stage, allocating each to her or his own 'happy ever after' and ends by saying 'So to your pleasures / I am for other than dancing measures' (Act 5, Scene 4). While the play as a whole is finally more on the side of the social lives of the lovers, Jaques's exit at this point, denying the 'dancing measures' of romantic convention, is surely more complex than that of a laughing stock whose actions the audience should reject.

'All the world's a stage' is clearly a set-piece speech. Even when spoken as part of a performance of *As You Like It*, it has a tendency to stand apart from the surrounding action. The next extract you will read is very different. There are two speakers and you will find that the feeling of the extract is quite different from Jaques's satiric survey of the 'ages of man'.

2.2 Passage 2: Court and country manners

The next activity gives you the opportunity to get to grips with the details of a different type of writing by Shakespeare: fast-moving comic dialogue.

Activity 2

Read the passage below, from Act 3, Scene 2. It is a short piece of dialogue between Corin, an old shepherd living in the Forest of Arden, and Touchstone, a court jester who has, like Orlando, fled Duke Frederick's court for the country. Touchstone has travelled, however, not with Orlando, but with Rosalind, the play's heroine, and her friend Celia. Celia is the daughter of the wicked Duke Frederick; Rosalind is the daughter of the good old Duke Senior. In this passage, Corin and Touchstone discuss the country life, a way of living new to Touchstone. As you read, think about the following question:

What contrasts can you find in this dialogue? Make a note of some particularly important contrasts.

When you have finished, click 'Reveal discussion'.

The numbered footnotes in the extract below can be accessed by clicking here: Passage 2 footnotes. If you would like to view text and footnotes together, you can do so on the Internet Shakespeare Editions website (lines 1212–1282, with notes indicated by the green underlining).

Enter Corin and Clown [Touchstone].

CORIN

And how like you this shepherd's life, Master Touchstone?

TOUCHSTONE

Truly, shepherd, in respect of[17] itself, it is a good life; but in respect that[18] it is a shepherd's life, it is naught[19]. In respect that it is solitary, I like it

very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare[20] life, look you[21], it fits my humour[22]well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach. Hast[23] any philosophy in thee, shepherd?

CORIN

No more but that I know the more one sickens the worse at ease he is; and that he that wants[24] money, means, and content is without three good friends; that the property of rain is to wet, and fire to burn; that good pasture makes fat sheep, and that a great cause of the night is lack of the sun; that he that hath learned no wit[25] by nature nor art[26] may complain of good breeding[27], or comes of a very dull[28] kindred[29].

TOUCHSTONE

Such a one is a natural[30] philosopher. Wast ever in court[31], shepherd?

CORIN

No, truly.

TOUCHSTONE

Then thou art damned.

CORIN

Nay, I hope[32].

TOUCHSTONE

Truly, thou art damned, like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side[33].

CORIN

For not being at court? Your reason.

TOUCHSTONE

Why, if thou never wast at court, thou never saw'st good manners; if thou never saw'st good manners, then thy manners must be wicked; and wickedness is sin, and sin is damnation. Thou art in a parlous[34] state, shepherd.

CORIN

Not a whit[35], Touchstone. Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behaviour of the country is most mockable at the court. You told me you salute not at the court but you kiss your hands[36]; that courtesy would be uncleanly if courtiers were shepherds.

TOUCHSTONE

Instance[37], briefly; come, instance.

CORIN

Why, we are still[38] handling our ewes, and their fells[39], you know, are greasy.

TOUCHSTONE

Why, do not your courtier's[40] hands sweat? And is not the grease of a mutton[41] as wholesome as the sweat of a man?[42] Shallow, shallow. A better instance, I say. Come.

CORIN

Besides, our hands are hard.

TOUCHSTONE

Your lips will feel them the sooner. Shallow again. A more sounder instance. Come.

CORIN

And they are often tarred over with the surgery[43] of our sheep; and would you have us kiss tar? The courtier's hands are perfumed with civet[44].

TOUCHSTONE

Most shallow man! Thou worm's meat in respect of[45] a good piece of flesh[46] indeed! Learn of the wise, and perpend[47] : civet is of a baser birth[48] than tar, the very uncleanly flux[49] of a cat. Mend the instance[50], shepherd.

CORIN

You have too courtly a wit for me. I'll rest[51].

TOUCHSTONE

Wilt thou rest[52] damned? God help thee, shallow man! God make incision in thee![53] Thou art raw[54].

CORIN

Sir, I am a true labourer: I earn that[55] I eat, get that[56] I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness, glad of other men's good, content with my harm[57], and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck.

TOUCHSTONE

That is another simple sin in you, to bring the ewes and the rams together and to offer[58] to get your living by the copulation of cattle[59]; to be bawd[60] to a bellwether[61] and to betray a she-lamb of a

twelvemonth to a crooked-pated[62] old cuckoldly[63] ram, out of all reasonable match[64]. If thou beest not damned for this, the devil himself will have no shepherds; I cannot see else[65] how thou shouldst 'scape[66].

Discussion

The major contrast here, running through the whole passage, is the contrast between court and country. In essence, in fact, all Corin and Touchstone do is to compare living in the country with living at court; this is the first of many conversations in the second half of the play that have no real bearing on its outcome. There is also a comical contrast between the over-elaborate logical framework of Touchstone's arguments – think of all those balanced phrases – and the nonsensicalness of his conclusions. There's a strong distinction, too, of course, between the courtly wit of the professional jester Touchstone

(or ‘Clowne’, as the first ever edition of the play, the ***First Folio*** of 1623, calls him) and the ‘natural’ philosophy of the shepherd Corin. In performance, this scene is often very funny because of the rapid interchange between the nonsensical contrasts that Touchstone makes (e.g. ‘In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life’) and Corin’s very basic common sense (‘the property of rain is to wet’). The apparently serious exchange about whether Corin is damned makes fun of Elizabethan educational practice, as Touchstone comically riffs on the **syllogism**, the standard method of argumentation used in **classical** logic: because Corin hasn’t been at court, he has never seen good manners, so it follows that ‘thy manners must be wicked, and wickedness is sin, and sin is damnation’. This sounds plausible enough, yet as Corin puts it in a balanced sentence of his own, ‘those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the country as the behaviour of the country is most mockable at the court’. Though Touchstone wins the ensuing verbal joust, his showy arguments don’t convince. Indeed, Touchstone often cuts a ‘mockable’ figure in the theatre through accent, costume and affectation, as productions present him as the proverbial fish out of water in Corin’s milieu of greasy ewes.

At the same time, there is a slightly unsettling contrast between Touchstone’s role in the argument – as the defender of a luxurious, idle court lifestyle – and his ludicrous pose as a religious firebrand (‘Then thou art damned’). This religious pose, meanwhile contrasts with the rather ridiculous terms in which it is expressed (‘thou art damned, like an ill-roasted egg’). Religious difference was at the heart of political conflict. Shakespeare was writing a few decades after the **Reformation** had split Europe into Catholic and Protestant states, sowing the seeds of more than a century of war and violence. To hear such divisive questions as the best way to salvation raised in such a light-hearted way as Touchstone does must have felt liberating. ‘Thou art in a parlous state, shepherd’, Touchstone teases, but the audience seldom feels that the peril (‘parlous’ is an old form of ‘perilous’) is real.

This sense of potentially risky topics being raised but bracketed off, being, in effect, in suspension, owes something to one of the most important genres (or types of literature) in the play: the fashionable mode of pastoral. ‘Pastoral’ in Shakespeare’s time was a type of writing that usually involved shepherds speaking in verse dialogue on a range of topics, including the simple virtues of country life and the trials of young love. It was a genre which enjoyed huge popularity in the ancient Greek and Roman classical period (which inaugurated many of its characteristic gestures and settings) and in the **Renaissance** Europe of Shakespeare’s day. A handy definition of pastoral is ‘a fictionalized imitation of rural life, usually the life of an imaginary **Golden Age**, in which the loves of shepherds and shepherdesses play a prominent part’ (Congleton and Brogan, 1993, p. 885). Such a definition, in fact, describes much of the setting and action of *As You Like It*. Yet there is more to Renaissance pastoral than this. As the critic Helen Cooper points out, its power has to do with the contrast – the ‘metaphorical or ironic relationship’ – between the real world and the fictional shepherd world created by the poet: the pastoral world is made to reflect ironically and metaphorically ‘the real world’ (Cooper, 1977, p. 2).

As Michael Hattaway puts it, the pastoral mode of the forest in the play is 'a condition – or a state of mind – rather than a place' (Shakespeare, 2009, p. 4).

2.3 Passage 3: Hymen's resolution

In this activity you will be analysing a third type of Shakespearean writing. This passage is in verse, like the 'All the world's a stage' speech you read earlier, but it is verse of a different kind, with a different atmosphere.

Activity 3

The third passage, from Act 5, Scene 4, comes from the very end of the play and involves the pairing off of four couples:

- the play's two main characters, Rosalind and Orlando
- Rosalind's cousin Celia and Orlando's brother Oliver
- the jester Touchstone and a country woman, Audrey
- the shepherd and shepherdess Silvius and Phoebe

Rosalind has spent time in the play disguised as the young man 'Ganymede'; her real identity unknown both to her father, Duke Senior, and her ardent admirer, Orlando. Unfortunately, the shepherdess Phoebe has fallen in love with 'Ganymede', scorning the young shepherd Silvius. Celia, too, has been in disguise, as the countrywoman 'Aliena'. Shortly before this extract, 'Ganymede' has promised to put all things right and extracts promises in turn from the group: The Duke promises that he will allow Orlando to marry Rosalind if she appears and Phoebe promises that if she can't marry 'Ganymede' she will marry Silvius. In the passage you are about to read, Rosalind produces a ***coup de théâtre*** – she makes an entry dressed like a woman, along with Celia and Hymen, the classical god of marriage.

As you read the extract, make some notes on the following questions:

- What is the tone of this extract?
- How does it differ from the tone of the previous two extracts?

When you have finished, click 'Reveal discussion'.

The numbered footnotes in the extract below can be accessed by clicking here: Passage 3 footnotes. If you would like to view text and footnotes together, you can do so on the Internet Shakespeare Editions website (lines 2683-2725, with notes indicated by the green underlining).

HYMEN

Then is there mirth[67] in heaven,

When earthly things made even[68]

Atone together[69].

Good duke, receive thy daughter;

Hymen from heaven brought her,

Yea, brought her hither,

That thou mightst join her hand with his,

Whose heart[70] within his bosom is.

ROSALIND

[To the Duke]

To you I give myself, for I am yours.

[To Orlando]

To you I give myself, for I am yours.

DUKE SENIOR

If there be truth in sight, you are my daughter.

ORLANDO

If there be truth in sight, you are my Rosalind.

PHOEBE

If sight and shape be true,

Why then, my love adieu!

ROSALIND

[To the Duke]

I'll have no father, if you be not he.

[To Orlando]

I'll have no husband, if you be not he;

[To Phoebe]

Nor ne'er wed woman, if you be not she.

HYMEN

Peace, ho! I bar[71] confusion.

'Tis I must make conclusion

Of these most strange events.

Here's eight that must take hands

To join in Hymen's bands,

If truth holds true contents[72].

[To Orlando and Rosalind]

You and you no cross shall part[73].

[To Oliver and Celia]

You and you are heart in heart.

[To Phoebe]

You to his love must accord[74]

Or have a woman to your lord[75].

[To Touchstone and Audrey]

You and you are sure together[76]

As the winter to foul weather.

[To All]

Whiles[77] a wedlock hymn we sing,

Feed yourselves with questioning,

That reason wonder may diminish[78],

How thus we met, and these things finish.

Song.

Wedding is great Juno's[79] crown,

O blessèd bond of board[80] and bed!

'Tis Hymen peoples every town;

High[81] wedlock then be honourèd.

Honour, high honour and renown

To Hymen, god of every town!

DUKE SENIOR

[To Celia]

O my dear niece, welcome thou art to me!

Even daughter[82], welcome, in no less degree.

PHOEBE

[To Silvius]

I will not eat my word[83], now thou art mine;

Thy faith my fancy to thee doth combine[84].

Discussion

We seem to enter a different world in this extract. Unlike Touchstone and Corin's rollicking dialogue, it is in verse, but verse with a very different atmosphere from that of Jaques's 'seven ages of man' speech. If you compare this passage with 'All the world's a stage', you will notice that, as well as rhyming and including shorter lines, it is made up of lines with clear endings. The sense does not run over from one line to the next (a feature known as **f**) as it does at moments such as Jaques's 'a world too wide [new line] For his shrunk shank'. Instead, each line seems rather grandly separate: 'Wedding is great Juno's crown. [new line] O blessèd bond of

board and bed!' The harmonious, ritualistic feeling of the passage is accentuated by the focus on generalisation and abstraction rather than the sorts of vivid and specific pictures Jaques and (more fleetingly) Corin and Touchstone conjure up (a baby being sick, spectacles on the nose of an old man, copulating sheep, sweaty hands . . .). Also contributing to this effect are the many moments of **alliteration** (the use of words beginning with the same letter) – 'blessèd', 'bond', 'board' and 'bed', for example – and by the many parallels in the language ('If there be truth in sight, you are my daughter' / 'If there be truth in sight, you are my Rosalind'; 'You and you no cross shall part' / 'You and you are heart in heart').

The solemnity of the moment is summed up in the stage direction: '*Enter Hymen, Rosalind, and Celia. Still Musicke*' (Shakespeare, 1623, p. 206). We've quoted here from the first printed edition (in the 1623 *First Folio* of Shakespeare's works) to show how modern editors tidy up and interpret the ambiguous evidence of performance practices in the early printed editions. (You can read the *Folio* text for yourself by going to the *Bodleian First Folio* website.Our text of the play identifies any stage directions that have been added to the Folio text by putting them in square brackets.) One of the modern editors of the play, Michael Hattaway, has the music coming first, before the entry of Rosalind and Celia; he notes that 'it seems appropriate that music should accompany the masque-like entrance, rather than coming after it' (Shakespeare, 2009, p. 208). The word 'Still' in this context in Shakespeare's day meant 'soft' or 'quiet'. Try to imagine an actor dressed in classical Roman costume, while subdued music sounds around him, ushering in the newly restored dukes' daughters in the costumes they wore at the opening of the play. Hattaway refers to another genre: **masques** were a fashionable form at this time. They were formal, courtly entertainments that used elaborate costuming and stage effects; they often featured classical gods entering to settle human squabbles – in his late play *The Tempest*, Shakespeare incorporated a masque that features classical goddesses. In *As You Like It*, Hymen is what is known, in the Latin phrase, as a ***deus ex machina***: a god who intervenes to resolve an impasse at the end of the plot of a play. The Roman poet Horace provided an influential treatment of this idea in his *Ars Poetica*, or 'The Art of Poetry'. This ancient work of literary advice was widely cited during the Renaissance because of the enormous prestige of Roman literature generally and Horace in particular. Shakespeare would have studied him at school; two characters in his early tragedy *Titus Andronicus* refer to doing this (Bate, 1994, p. 20). Shakespeare would therefore have realised that *As You Like It* lightly plays against Horace's warning: 'Don't let a god intervene unless the dénouement requires/such a solution' (Rudd, 1979, p. 195). Hymen comes from a different literary world from Rosalind and the shepherds, which is precisely why Horace warns against this sort of supernatural device. Introducing a god necessarily stretches an audience's credulity. Why then did Shakespeare do it? The answer to this is contained in the rest of the extract: *As You Like It* follows the ancient comic convention of ending with the marriage of its young protagonists (Miola, 2000, p. 72). This is easy enough in the case of Celia and Oliver (who meet and fall immediately in love towards the end of the play [reported in Act 5, Scene 2]) and even in the earthy romance of Audrey and Touchstone (Act 3, Scene 3), but requires more effort in the cases of Rosalind and Orlando and Phoebe and Silvius because of the confusions set

in train by Rosalind's disguise as a boy. Hymen stresses (in the categorical way typical of gods) that it is his job to 'make conclusion/Of these most strange events' and then in his song asserts the social value of marriage: ''Tis Hymen peoples every town'.

The continuation of the human race demands the somewhat arbitrary marrying off of Phoebe to Silvius as well as the love match of Rosalind and Orlando. Note that there is no possibility of a union between Rosalind and Phoebe: 'You to *his* love must accord,/Or have a *woman* to your *lord*' (emphases added). Hymen is the god of heterosexual orthodoxy. This is hardly fair on Phoebe, who nevertheless fulfils the promise she has made: 'I will not eat my word now thou art mine'. I don't think we're supposed to see this as a wholly satisfactory conclusion – perhaps not even for Silvius, who must trust that the marriage he has longed for will link Phoebe's 'fancy' to his 'faith' as effortlessly as she does in her final line. But it is one which is in keeping with almost all Shakespeare comedies: by the end, the main characters tend to marry one another, more or less gladly. In this respect, the four weddings in *As You Like It* are a microcosm of the marriages that close Shakespeare plays as varied as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*.

Reading and thinking about these three passages will have given you some pointers about what sort of play *As You Like It* is, as well as a sense of the variety of its moods. You may well think that your investigation has gone some way to substantiate Michael Hattaway's view that *As You Like It* resists any 'monolithic meaning' through the range of signals it gives its audience (Shakespeare, 2009, p. 4). In the next section, you will look at the heart of the play: the romance between Rosalind and Orlando.

3 Language and role-play

Though Rosalind, the main character in *As You Like It*, has no soliloquies (speeches to the audience when she is alone on stage) until the epilogue of the play, it is her voice, like Hamlet's in *Hamlet*, that dominates in the performance. According to the *Open Source Shakespeare* website, she has 201 speeches; the closest to this is Orlando, with 120, while Jaques has only 57 (*Open Source Shakespeare* (n.d.) *As You Like It*). That Rosalind does not soliloquise tells us important things about her role and the temperature of the play as a whole. Rosalind's role is dialogic and educational: she is typically talking to someone about something (or someone), and often with an agenda. Consider the following exchange with Jaques in Act 4, Scene 1, where Rosalind, in her persona as 'Ganymede', quizzes him about his **melancholy**:

JAQUES

Why, 'tis good to be sad and say nothing.

ROSALIND

Why then, 'tis good to be a post.

JAQUES

I have […] a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness.

ROSALIND

A traveller! By my faith, you have great reason to be sad. I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men's. Then to have seen much and to have nothing is to have rich eyes and poor hands.

This exchange stresses Jaques's comic self-importance as an outsider. Rosalind punctures his conceit first by the ironic, proverbial one-liner, ''tis good to be a post'. Where Jaques pretentiously presents his sadness as a product of his unique specialness, Rosalind offers the commonsensical thought that he is miserable because he has sold his land to see other men's. She suggests that he has traded 'rich eyes' for 'poor hands': travel only empties the pocket. In the workaday perspective that is never far from the surface of the play, Rosalind insists on the material value of land over the less obvious benefits Jaques attributes to his roving temperament. And she does this in a distinctive, bantering prose style, which is one of the most enjoyable features of *As You Like It*.

Rosalind's role is partly a product of this manner of speaking, this prose idiom that has the virtue of cutting through pretension while also suggesting that all characters, and the audience, still have much to learn.

Activity 4

To develop this sense of role and language play, let's now take a closer look at the scene, Act 4, Scene 1, from which this exchange comes. As we've mentioned, *AsYou Like It* is notorious for its long conversations with little plot development. Most of this scene is a conversation of this type between Orlando and Rosalind. Orlando fell in love with Rosalind before leaving Duke Frederick's court. He has no idea that 'Ganymede', a young man he has come to know in the Forest of Arden, is in fact Rosalind in disguise. Rosalind and Celia, on the other hand, both know exactly who Orlando is, and Rosalind takes some delight in manipulating this one-sided situation to her advantage. In a previous scene, Act 3, Scene 2, she (or, rather, 'Ganymede') has suggested that it might be a good idea for Orlando to practise his chat-up lines on 'Ganymede' pretending that 'he' is Rosalind. In this scene, at a prearranged meeting for which Orlando is late, this plan is put into operation.

The scene as a whole consists of three overlapping exchanges:

- A rather competitive little dialogue between Jaques and Rosalind
- A long flirtation between Orlando and Rosalind
- A concluding section in which Celia teases Rosalind

Celia is on stage with Rosalind throughout, but Rosalind is the dominant speaker. No single position remains unchallenged. Rosalind mocks Jaques and Orlando in turn, but is then mocked for her hypocrisy, while her realism about love is undone by her own admission 'how many fathom deep I am in love!'. The framing of the conversation between Rosalind and Orlando by the exchanges with Jaques and Celia helps to complicate the sense we make of the characters within the scene.

You should now read the scene in full. As you read the text below, note down examples of the following different uses of language:

comical comparison

exaggeration

lists

poetry

promises

references to classical mythology

threats

wise sayings or proverbs

wooing

What are the effects of these different uses of language on the way we think about the characters in the scene?

Don't forget that, throughout her conversation with Orlando, Rosalind is posing as a male character, 'Ganymede', and that 'Ganymede' is acting the part of 'Rosalind' to help Orlando with his wooing!

The numbered footnotes in the extract below can be accessed by clicking here: passage footnotes. If you would like to view text and footnotes together, you can do so on the Internet Shakespeare Editions website (with notes indicated by the green underlining).

Here is the scene in full:

Enter Rosalind, Celia, and Jaques.

JAQUES

I prithee, pretty youth, let me be better acquainted with thee.

ROSALIND

They say you are a melancholy fellow.

JAQUES

I am so. I do love it better than laughing.

ROSALIND

Those that are in extremity[85] of either are abominable fellows and betray themselves to every modern censure[86] worse than drunkards.

JAQUES

Why, 'tis good to be sad[87] and say nothing.

ROSALIND

Why then, 'tis good to be a post.

JAQUES

I have neither the scholar's melancholy[88], which is emulation[89]; nor the musician's, which is fantastical[90]; nor the courtier's, which is proud[91]; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious[92]; nor the lawyer's, which is politic[93]; nor the lady's, which is nice[94]; nor the lover's, which is all these; but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects[95], and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels[96], in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness[97].

ROSALIND

A traveller! By my faith, you have great reason to be sad. I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men's. Then to have seen much and to have nothing is to have rich eyes and poor hands.

JAQUES

Yes, I have gained my experience.

Enter Orlando

ROSALIND

And your experience makes you sad. I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad – and to travel for it too!

ORLANDO

Good day and happiness, dear Rosalind!

JAQUES

Nay then, God b'wi' you, an[98] you talk in blank verse.

ROSALIND

Farewell, Monsieur Traveller. Look you lisp[99] and wear strange suits, disable[100] all the benefits of your own country, be out of love with your nativity[101], and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are[102], or I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola[103].

Jaques exits.

Why, how now, Orlando, where have you been all this while? You a lover? An[104] you serve me such another trick, never come in my sight more.

ORLANDO

My fair Rosalind, I come within an hour of my promise.

ROSALIND

Break an hour's promise in love? He that will divide a minute into a thousand parts and break but a part of the thousand[105] part of a minute in the affairs of love, it may be said of him that Cupid[106] hath clapped him o' th' shoulder, but I'll warrant him heart-whole[107].

ORLANDO

Pardon me, dear Rosalind.

ROSALIND

Nay, an[108] you be so tardy, come no more in my sight. I had as lief be wooed[109] of a snail.

ORLANDO

Of a snail?

ROSALIND

Ay, of a snail, for though he comes slowly, he carries his house on his head – a better jointure[110], I think, than you make a woman. Besides, he brings his destiny with him.

ORLANDO

What's that?

ROSALIND

Why, horns[111], which such as you are fain[112] to be beholding to your wives for. But he comes armed in his fortune[113] and prevents[114] the slander of his wife.

ORLANDO

Virtue is no hornmaker, and my Rosalind is virtuous.

ROSALIND

And I am your Rosalind.

CELIA

It pleases him to call you so, but he hath a Rosalind of a better leer[115] than you.

ROSALIND

Come, woo me, woo me, for now I am in a holiday humour[116], and like enough to consent. What would you say to me now an[117] I were your very, very[118] Rosalind?

ORLANDO

I would kiss before I spoke.

ROSALIND

Nay, you were better[119] speak first, and when you were gravelled[120] for lack of matter[121], you might take occasion[122] to kiss. Very good orators, when they are out[123], they will spit; and for lovers lacking – God warn us! – matter, the cleanliest shift[124] is to kiss.

ORLANDO

How if the kiss be denied?

ROSALIND

Then she puts you to entreaty[125], and there begins new matter.

ORLANDO

Who could be out[126], being before his beloved mistress?

ROSALIND

Marry[127], that should you if I were your mistress[128], or I should think my honesty ranker[129] than my wit.

ORLANDO What, of my suit[130]?

ROSALIND Not out of your apparel[131], and yet out of your suit. Am not I your Rosalind?

ORLANDO

I take some joy[132] to say you are because I would be talking[133] of her.

ROSALIND

Well, in her person, I say I will not have you.

ORLANDO

Then, in mine own person, I die.

ROSALIND

No, faith, die by attorney[134]. The poor world is almost six thousand years old, and in all this time there was not any man died[135] in his own person, *videlicet*[136], in a love cause. Troilus[137] had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club, yet he did what he could to die before and he is one of the patterns of love. Leander[138], he would have lived many a fair year though Hero had turned nun, if it had not been for a hot midsummer night, for, good youth, he went but forth to wash him in the Hellespont and, being taken with the cramp, was drowned; and the foolish chroniclers of that age

found it[139] was Hero of Sestos. But these are all lies. Men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love.

ORLANDO

I would not have my right[140] Rosalind of this mind, for I protest[141] her frown might kill me.

ROSALIND

By this hand, it will not kill a fly. But come, now I will be your Rosalind in a more coming-on disposition; and ask me what you will, I will grant it.

ORLANDO

Then love me, Rosalind.

ROSALIND

Yes, faith, will I, Fridays and Saturdays and all.

ORLANDO

And wilt thou have me?

ROSALIND

Ay, and twenty such.

ORLANDO

What sayest thou?

ROSALIND

Are you not good?

ORLANDO

I hope so.

ROSALIND

Why then, can one desire too much of a good thing? – Come, sister, you shall be the priest, and marry us. – Give me your hand,Orlando. – What do you say, sister?

ORLANDO

Pray thee, marry us.

CELIA

I cannot say the words.

ROSALIND

You must begin ‘Will you, Orlando – ’

CELIA

Go to[142]. – Will you, Orlando, have to wife this Rosalind?

ORLANDO

I will.

ROSALIND

Ay, but when?

ORLANDO

Why now, as fast as she can marry us.

ROSALIND

Then you must say, 'I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.'

ORLANDO

I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.

ROSALIND

I might ask you for your commission[143], but I do take thee,

Orlando, for my husband. There's a girl[144] goes before the priest, and certainly a woman's thought runs before her actions.

ORLANDO

So do all thoughts. They are winged.

ROSALIND

Now tell me how long you would have her after you have possessed her.

ORLANDO

Forever and a day.

ROSALIND

Say 'a day' without the 'ever.' No, no, Orlando, men are April[145] when they woo, December[146] when they wed. Maids are May[147] when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives. I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon[148] over his hen, more clamorous than a parrot against rain[149], more newfangled[150] than an ape, more giddy in my desires than a monkey. I will weep for nothing[151], like Diana in the fountain[152], and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry; I will laugh like a hyena, and that when thou art inclined to sleep.

ORLANDO

But will my Rosalind do so?

ROSALIND

By my life, she will do as I do.

ORLANDO

Oh, but she is wise.

ROSALIND

Or else she could not have the wit to do this. The wiser, the waywarder. Make the doors[153] upon a woman's wit, and it will out[154] at the casement[155]; shut that, and 'twill out at the keyhole; stop that, 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney.

ORLANDO

A man that had a wife with such a wit, he might say ‘Wit, whither wilt?[156]‘

ROSALIND

Nay, you might keep that check[157] for it till you met your wife’s wit going to your neighbour’s bed.

ORLANDO

And what wit[158] could wit have to excuse that?

ROSALIND

Marry[159], to say she came to seek you there. You shall never take her[160] without her answer unless you take her without her tongue. Oh, that woman that cannot make her fault her husband’s occasion[161], let her never nurse her child herself, for she will breed it[162] like a fool.

ORLANDO

For these two hours, Rosalind, I will leave thee.

ROSALIND

Alas, dear love, I cannot lack[163] thee two hours.

ORLANDO

I must attend the Duke at dinner[164]. By two o’clock I will be with thee again.

ROSALIND

Ay, go your ways[165], go your ways. I knew what you would prove[166]. My friends told me as much, and I thought no less. That flattering tongue of yours won me. ‘Tis but one cast away[167], and so, come, death! Two o’clock is your hour?

ORLANDO

Ay, sweet Rosalind.

ROSALIND

By my troth[168], and in good earnest, and so God mend[169] me, and by all pretty oaths that are not dangerous[170], if you break one jot of your promise, or come one minute behind your hour, I will think you the most pathetical[171] break-promise, and the most hollow lover, and the most unworthy of her you call Rosalind, that may be chosen out of the gross band[172] of the unfaithful. Therefore beware my censure, and keep your promise.

ORLANDO

With no less religion[173] than if thou wert indeed my Rosalind. So, adieu.

ROSALIND

Well, time is the old justice[174] that examines all such offenders, and let time try. Adieu.

CELIA

You have simply misused[175] our sex in your love-prate[176]. We must have your doublet and hose[177] plucked over your head and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest.

ROSALIND

O coz[178], coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love. But it cannot be sounded[179]; my affection hath an unknown bottom, like the Bay of Portugal.

CELIA

Or rather bottomless, that[180] as fast as you pour affection in, it runs out.

ROSALIND

No, that same wicked bastard[181] of Venus[182], that was begot of thought[183], conceived of spleen[184], and born of madness, that blind rascally boy that abuses[185] everyone's eyes because his own are out, let him be judge how deep I am in love. I'll tell thee, Aliena, I cannot be out of the sight of Orlando. I'll go find a shadow[186] and sigh till he come.

CELIA

And I'll sleep.

You should now have a list of examples of uses of language in the scene grouped under the following headings, along with any thoughts you have about their effect in the scene. Click 'Reveal Discussion'.

- Comical comparisons
- Exaggeration
- Lists
- Poetry
- Promises
- References to classical mythology
- Threats
- Wise sayings or proverbs
- Wooing

Discussion

Comical comparisons

My favourite comparison in this scene comes near the end when, after Orlando has left, Rosalind confesses to her sister that her affection 'hath an unknown bottom, like the Bay of Portugal.' She could, of course, have expressed the depth of her love by comparing it to something in a more conventionally poetic way. The note of comedy, however, makes the moment seem more vivid and 'realistic', and is fully in tune with a scene in which Rosalind has, in attempting to bring Orlando's romanticism down to earth, compared herself to a jealous 'Barbary cock-pigeon', a parrot, an ape, a

hyena, and implicitly compared Orlando to a snail and the ‘sad’ and silent Jaques to a post.

Exaggeration

An alternative, somewhat technical term for exaggeration that Shakespeare himself would have recognised is ‘hyperbole’. There is a good example of this when Rosalind tells off Orlando for his lateness: she claims that somebody who ‘will divide a minute into a thousand parts and break but a part of the thousand part of a minute in the affairs of love’ is not a proper lover. When she says this, of course, she is posing as an imaginary version of herself: as far as Orlando is concerned, she is not Rosalind but ‘Ganymede’, a young man pretending to be Rosalind. This gives her the licence to act an exaggerated version of her own feelings – or, perhaps we should say, to indulge the excess of her own feelings. ‘Hyperbole’ of another, less knowing, kind is indulged in by the pompous Jaques and the naïvely romantic Orlando.

Lists

The first long list is Jaques’s rather arrogant list of different types of melancholy, the point of which is that none of them are relevant to him: he has a special kind of melancholy of his own. Rosalind’s debunking of Jaques’s pomposity involves a list of irritating melancholy things she ironically tells him to do: ‘wear strange suits’, ‘be out of love with your nativity’ and so on. Later on, she uses an even more extravagant and light-hearted list to debunk herself, to bring herself down from the pedestal on which Orlando has placed her, claiming that after their marriage, she will be ‘more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen, more clamorous than a parrot against rain, more newfangled than an ape, more giddy in my desires than a monkey. I will weep for nothing, like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry; I will laugh like a hyena, and that when thou art inclined to sleep.’

Poetry

This passage is, of course, essentially in prose rather than verse. It does include, however, a perfect piece of verse in Orlando’s initial greeting: ‘Good day, and happiness, dear Rosalind’. This is a line of a ten-syllable iambic pentameter (a line with five unstressed syllables alternating with five stressed syllables: diDUM diDUM diDUM diDUM diDUM: Good DAY and HAPPiNESS dear ROSaLIND), the standard **‘blank verse’** (i.e. unrhymed verse) unit Shakespeare uses in much of the rest of the play. (The ‘All the world’s a stage’ speech uses blank verse, though not in a particularly regular form). Jaques immediately recognises this as ‘blank verse’ and takes it as his occasion to leave, presumably because of the allergic reaction to Orlando’s poetry he has expressed earlier in the play, in Act 3, Scene 2. People often claim that Shakespeare reserves verse for courtly characters and prose for servants and other characters outside the social elite. In *As You Like It*, however, the courtiers prefer an elaborate prose, whereas shepherds tend to speak in verse. We must be careful not to confuse verse with sophistication and prose with naturalness.

Promises

At the beginning and the end of the scene, Rosalind makes much of Orlando's 'promise' to come and see her at a particular time. Another 'promise' of Orlando's comes at what might be considered the emotional heart of the passage, in the mock marriage ceremony: 'Will you, Orlando, have to wife this Rosalind?' 'I will'. It is only Orlando who has to be asked to make this promise. (Rosalind jumps in to say she will take Orlando, without having to wait to be asked whether she will or not. She therefore does not actually say the two words 'I will'.) Immediately after the 'ceremony', Rosalind jokingly claims that Orlando will renege on his promise, 'having' her for '"a day" without the "ever"'.

References to classical mythology

Rosalind mentions the Roman god of love, Cupid, both at the beginning and the end of the scene; she also compares herself to a statue of Diana, goddess of chastity. Most telling, however, are the classical references she makes when claiming to Orlando that nobody ever died for love. Orlando, like many a lover before and since, has responded to a loved one's apparent rejection ('Well, in her person, I say I will not have you') by claiming that he will die as a result. Mocking this self-dramatisation, Rosalind names two classical figures who were bywords for (or 'patterns of') love in Shakespeare's day, and to whom Orlando might well have compared himself, and proceeds to ruthlessly demystify their deaths: Troilus (a character made famous by the medieval writer Chaucer, later to appear in one of Shakespeare's most cynical plays, *Troilus and Cressida*), and Leander (the subject of a sumptuous erotic poem, *Hero and Leander*, by Shakespeare's great contemporary, Christopher Marlowe). Rosalind is deliberately injecting a note of realism into Orlando's high-flown, idealistic approach to love. She does this using strikingly unromantic legal terms ('videlicet', 'attorney', 'cause' [a word for a legal case]), as if she is an apprentice lawyer ('Full of wise saws and modern instances' to quote the 'All the world's a stage' speech), rather than a girl in love.

Threats

Rosalind (as 'Ganymede' pretending to be Rosalind) greets Orlando with a threat: if you're ever as late again, 'never come in my sight more'. This bossy, high and mighty tone is an important characteristic of Ganymede's version of Rosalind: throughout this scene she/he guides the conversation, even though it is supposedly Orlando who is wooing 'Rosalind'. At the end, she dismisses him with a second threat about lateness: 'if you . . . break one jot of your promise, or come one minute behind your hour, I will think you the most pathetical break-promise, and the most hollow lover, and the most unworthy of her you call Rosalind, that may be chosen out of the gross band of the unfaithful'. It seems to be an act, a massive exaggeration – and yet, surely, Rosalind means every word: she is desperate to see as much of Orlando as possible.

Wise sayings or proverbs

Shakespeare's contemporaries loved making generalisations about experience as a sort of guide to life. They were, in fact, trained at school to look for such moments in the books they read and copy them into notebooks. Shakespeare provides them with a few in this passage. Early on, Rosalind uses one such proverbial-seeming generalisation to undermine everything that Jaques has said: 'I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad'. Later on, having 'married' Orlando, she warns that things might come unstuck after the wedding: 'men are April when they woo, December when they wed. Maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives'.

Wooing

The scene has been planned in advance by Orlando and Rosalind to allow Orlando to practise his wooing on a version of Rosalind acted by 'Ganymede'. Yet when the scene takes place, Orlando actually does very little wooing. Elsewhere in the play – and out of sight of Rosalind – he has written and spoken extravagant love poems, and these have been roundly mocked in Act 3, Scene 2 of the play. In this scene, however, the extent of Orlando's 'wooing' as such is minimal. All it really amounts to is two lines, 'Then, in mine own person, I die' and 'Then love me, Rosalind'.

3.1 Rosalind, Orlando and role-play

Neither your responses nor mine in the previous activity will have exhausted the richness of the scene, for even in such a relatively short passage, Shakespeare's theatrical and linguistic inventiveness is exceptionally varied – at times almost bewildering. We could use one of Rosalind's own words to characterise it: 'giddy' (i.e. changeable, even skittish). Most of the variety comes in Rosalind's speeches: she goes through quicksilver changes in mood, from teasing Orlando for his tardiness, to a 'holiday humour' in which she is 'like enough to consent'. She is, of course, a playing a double game here. While robustly demystifying Orland's adoration (as 'Ganymede' pretending to be 'Rosalind'), she is herself passionately in love with him. How seriously, then, can we take anything she says in the exchange? There are many different possible answers to this question for readers (and theatre directors). As throughout the play, Orlando's is the simpler role: he is the idealistic lover, frequently dismayed by Rosalind's realism about love. 'But will my Rosalind do so?', he asks when 'Ganymede' has given him a summary of the capricious behaviours Rosalind would adopt after marriage. At the same time, a good actor needs to suggest elements of impatience with the game the characters are playing. 'I take some joy to say you are [Rosalind], because I would be talking of her' injects a note of realism that, by Act 5, Scene 2, becomes even more pronounced when Orlando says, 'I can live no longer by thinking'. The editor of one of the most recent editions of the play, Michael Hattaway, suggests that one of the crucial

decisions for productions is whether Orlando sees through Rosalind's disguise, and lines like these are fertile in the kind of theatrical ambiguity on which the play thrives (Shakespeare, 2009, p. 41).

What precisely is the audience seeing in this scene when 'Ganymede' is wooed by Orlando? In modern productions, we usually see an actress dressed as a boy, educating a young man in the realities of love, which makes perfect sense of Celia's warning to Rosalind: 'We must have your doublet and hose plucked over your head, and show the world what the bird hath done to her own nest'. In other words: by stripping you, we'll show that you're really a woman, hypocritically attacking your own sex. Rosalind's gender-switching in Arden has seemed to many critics to entail a liberating putting off of rigid cultural norms (one view is, indeed, that her marriage to Orlando at the end of the play seems a cruel restriction of erotic and emotional possibility). Catherine Belsey finds in the play 'a kind of undecidability, a place [. . .] neither masculine nor feminine but utopian, in its glimpse of a possibility of a third space beyond either' (in Belsey et al., 2000, p. 35). For others, heterosexual marriage is a happy ending, with Rosalind's 'holiday' wooing by (and of) Orlando a necessary part of the development of her relationship.

In an Elizabethan performance, the complexity of the represented action was more extreme than it seems in most performances today, as the part of Rosalind would have been taken by a boy actor. Bruce R. Smith clarifies the problem: 'In the dalliance of "Orlando" and "Rosalind" [Shakespeare's audience] would have witnessed in literal fact what Orlando and Rosalind were playing out in fiction: a man and boy flirting with abandon and getting away with it'. Yet, as Smith recognises, 'We can never know […] what went on in the heads of people who have been dead for four hundred years' (Smith, 1994, pp. 147, 149).

Smith's stricture is a useful reminder about the nature of the evidence we deal with when we try to imagine early performances. It is also, by implication, a warning about audience sympathy, which must be negotiated anew with each new performance. The critic Emrys Jones observes that 'during a performance of a play something comes into being which can be called […] an "audience mind" – something to which actors respond as to a single entity: the corporate presence in the auditorium' (Jones, 1971, p. 7). Sympathy will depend on the precise nature of a given performance, and how those involved (actors, directors, musicians, technicians and audience) realise and respond to the script on a given night. What we can say about the scene we have just been unpicking is that it is skilful in its balanced allocation of attention to different roles and perspectives; Rosalind dominates, but she doesn't tyrannise. Her tutorial in love is simultaneously categorical ('the sky changes when they are wives') and capricious ('I knew what you would prove – my friends told me as much'); it is a complex act of flirtation that aims to educate and captivate Orlando, while doing the same sort of work on the audience. Yet the final words are Celia's 'I'll sleep', which reverts to a workaday idiom to undercut Rosalind's own romantic hyperbole in the penultimate speech. Love and communication, Shakespeare implies, never take place in a social vacuum.

4 The play in performance

In the final activity in this course, you will address the issue of performance.

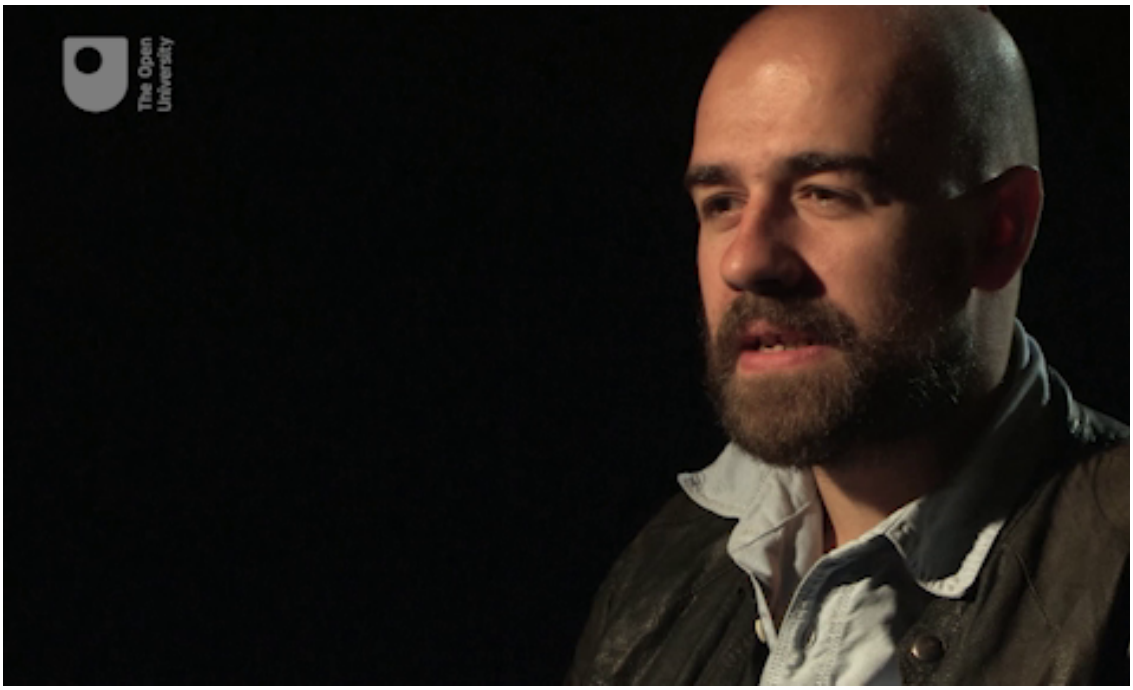
It has often been argued in the past that Shakespeare's plays should ideally be experienced on the stage rather than on the page, that they are fundamentally 'theatrical' rather than 'literary' texts, and that Shakespeare wrote them primarily for performance. There is a great deal to be said for this point of view, of course, and a good performance, whether watched in the theatre, or on the TV, cinema or mobile phone screen, or heard in an audio recording, brings life to Shakespeare's words in a special way that's difficult for an individual reader to equal. There is, however, as I hope this course has demonstrated, also a great deal to be gained from a patient look at the details of Shakespeare's language. Shakespeare was certainly, as the cliché goes, a 'man of the theatre'. An actor himself, he worked closely with the theatrical company he was associated with ('The Lord Chamberlain's Men', later renamed 'The King's Men'). It has recently been argued, indeed, that the closeness of this company-playwright relationship was unique in Shakespeare's time (van Es, 2013). It is quite possible, however, and has been argued forcibly by Erne (2003), that Shakespeare nevertheless also wanted people to read the printed texts of his plays, some of which (*Hamlet*, for instance) were published in versions much too long for performance in his own time.

Activity 5

You now have an opportunity to compare the 'production in your head' that you have been imagining as you read the play with a performance of a few lines by professional actors. Watch the short video below, in which the director Michael Oakley runs a workshop with actors from an Oxford Shakespeare Company production of *As You Like It*, and in which Oakley and Professor Richard Danson Brown from The Open University discuss the play. Before you do so, however, reread the 'mock marriage' section of Act 4, Scene 1, from Celia's words 'Will you, Orlando . . ' to Rosalind's 'runs before her actions'. As you read, make notes about how you think the actors might speak the lines (and perhaps be positioned in relation to each other on the stage and/or move about) in a production of the play. Focus on each line spoken by each character in turn. You can either read the text as given earlier in the course or on the Internet Shakespeare Editions website (lines 2038–2050, with notes indicated by the green underlining).

Compare your notes to two of the three workshop performances of the lines: the first performance (5 minutes 47 seconds into the video) and the third performance (8 minutes, 25 seconds into the video). (Be warned that there are a couple of minor variations in wording in the performances.) Did anything take you by surprise? Which of the performances do you prefer? Why?

When you have finished, click 'Reveal discussion'.



Discussion

Even though we are only dealing with a few seconds of dialogue, there are many possibilities here. Shakespeare does not spell out exactly how the actors should approach the scene. This is not unusual: it is, in fact characteristic not only of much of the rest of *As You Like It*, but of Shakespeare's other plays as well. Many of the most striking moments in Shakespeare's works can in fact be said to derive much of their power from such ambiguity – that is from things not being explained or made completely clear. At such moments, a great deal of room is left for readerly and actorly interpretation.

In this scene, for example, how do you think Orlando should say 'I will'? Flirtatiously? Deadly seriously? Mock dramatically, with a twinkle in his eye? Reluctantly, embarrassed at having to go through with such a silly game? I find that I agree with Michael Oakley that the third very speedy version of the scene in the video loses some of the seriousness that should be present in the 'ceremony', and that the pause he talks about helps underline that seriousness. The first, more 'solemn' performance, however, seems rather static.

My own reading of the line 'I might ask for your commission' is that it should be spoken by Rosalind to Celia in her role as 'priest', rather than to Orlando. (I think Rosalind is admitting to 'the priest' that she should wait for her/his authority ['commission'] before saying that she will 'take' Orlando; in other words, that she should wait for Celia to ask 'Will you, Rosalind . . .?') At this point, then, I wouldn't, as Oakley does, have Rosalind and Orlando looking into each other's eyes. But there's nothing definitive about my reading, and you may well think Oakley has got it right.

How did you imagine Celia saying her lines? In some productions, she is clearly irritated throughout the mock wedding, upset at the serious turn events seem to be taking and unhappy at the prospect of losing her friend. In the video, we get a glimpse of this at the end, when the actress playing Celia stalks off.

In the video, the actors line up on stage in quite a formal arrangement, but there is no need for them to do this. There are lots of other possibilities. One or more of them, for example, might have to be physically pulled over to take part in the ‘ceremony’, there might be a kiss at the end (or in the middle), and so on.

Conclusion

This free course, *Reading Shakespeare's* As You Like It, has looked at a selection of key moments from a very rich play: a vivid survey of the roles people play in their lives; a discussion about the difference between life at court and life in the country; the resolution of the plot by a classical god; and a piece of disorientating, gender-switching flirtation. At this point, you may like to look back at the critical opinions listed in Section 1 of the course. Do you think that your experience of *As You Like It* helps support or refute any of the critics' descriptions? Michael Hattaway suggests that the play's variety of moods and types of writing are so provocative that it is best seen as a 'tragi-comedy': a play where the 'woeful pageants' detailed by Jaques in the seven ages of man speech all but eclipse the 'true delights' of love and marriage referred to in the final line. An earlier critic, Helen Gardner, began a lecture on the play with precisely the opposite perspective: 'It is the last play in the world to be solemn over' (Gardner, 1959, p. 203). Hattaway's sense of darkness and complexity is more in keeping with the approaches of many twenty-first-century Shakespeareans, but that doesn't mean it is correct and that this is a simple case of the new superseding the old.

Gardner is correct about the play's literary refinement even though the conventions which Shakespeare inherited are complex enough to mean that a play about falling in love may at the same time contain other resonances, both veiled and overt. The hybridity and variety of the play is, meanwhile, a feature of *As You Like It* that is surely undeniable. Indeed, the complexity of *As You Like It* – the way it is threaded through with contrasting motifs and traditions and shot through with both light and shade – helps us understand a key part of the literary period from which it comes, the Elizabethan Renaissance: that its best literature is almost always a mixture of contrasting ingredients.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course A334 *English literature from Shakespeare to Austen*.

Glossary

Alliteration

The repetition of the same letter at the beginning of words that are close together (e.g. ‘look you lisp’).

Blank verse

Unrhymed lines of verse, often in an iambic pentameter, the most common metre in English and the metre used in most of the verse sections in *As You Like It*. (‘Metre’ is the general technical term for the underlying regular rhythm or beat that a poem may adopt.) A regular line of an iambic pentameter consists of ten syllables, each made of five two-syllable sections (or ‘feet’); in each foot, an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable (creating a ‘di-dum’ effect). In practice, however, many works in iambic pentameter use rhythm much more flexibly than this; often, for example, in the first foot of a line, the stressed syllable will come first.

Classical

In this course the word ‘classical’ is used to refer to the ‘classical’ period of ancient Greece and Rome. ‘Classical literature’ therefore simply means ‘literature produced in ancient Greece and Rome’.

Coup de théâtre

A sudden, startling and dramatic thing that happens in a story (usually in a play) and that is designed to make a big impact on the audience. French for ‘blow (or hit, or stroke) of the theatre’.

Court

The extended household of a monarch or, as in *As You Like It*, a duke. A court consists of servants, officials and hangers-on hoping for favours from the ruler. In Shakespeare’s time, the royal court was based at Whitehall in London but travelled with the monarch; it was at the centre of political life.

Deus ex machina

Literally, in Greek and Roman drama, ‘god from a [stage] machine’, a god brought in at the last minute to resolve a challenging plot situation. The phrase has come to be used metaphorically to mean the use of anything artificial or improbable to resolve the plot of a story.

Enjambment

In poetry, the running over of a sentence or phrase from one line to the next.

First Folio

The first book to bring together in a single volume a collection of plays by Shakespeare. Including 36 plays and prepared by two old theatrical colleagues of Shakespeare, John Heminges and Henry Condell, it appeared in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare’s death. The term ‘folio’ refers to the size of the book: it is a large-format volume in which each sheet of paper is folded only once down the middle, forming two leaves, or four pages.

Genre

French for ‘kind’ or ‘type’. A genre is a category or type of literature (‘comedy’ or ‘tragedy’, for example) with its own forms and conventions.

Golden Age

An imaginary past time of perfect, idyllic happiness.

Irony

If a piece of writing is ‘ironic’, its actual meaning is something a bit different from the literal meaning of the words. When Rosalind says to Jaques that it is good to be a post, she does not literally mean that it is good to be a post.

Masque

An indoor entertainment, often at court, involving lavish scenery and costumes, special effects, music and dancing, often on a mythological theme in praise of the monarch.

Melancholy

A depressed state of mind, fashionable in Shakespeare’s England. It was associated with black, disordered clothing, folded arms and a floppy hat.

Metaphor

A figure of speech implying that two things are similar, but without using a word such as ‘like’ to compare them explicitly. ‘All the world’s a stage’ is an example. By contrast, a simile is a device that highlights the fact that a comparison is taking place by using words such as ‘like’ and ‘as’ (‘The world is like a stage’).

Pastoral

A genre of literature dating back to ancient Greek and Roman times involving a countryside setting and characters who are shepherds or shepherdesses. Pastoral literature often involves a contrast between the corruption, greed and decadence of cities and the innocence of the countryside.

Puritan

In Shakespeare's time, a term of abuse for a religious extremist; a person who insisted on the importance of moral ‘purity’ and ‘pure’ Protestant (i.e. anti-Catholic) doctrine and who was opposed to such ‘sinful’ things as theatrical performances.

Reformation

A movement in Christianity that began in the 1500s aiming to ‘reform’ the Roman Catholic Church, getting rid of corrupt practices, and which led to the creation of a new ‘Protestant’ type of Christianity. About 30 years before Shakespeare was born, England broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and became a Protestant country. In the Europe of Shakespeare’s day, religious differences were also political differences, and Catholic countries (like England’s then greatest enemy, Spain) went to war with Protestant ones.

Renaissance

French for ‘rebirth’, this is the name often given to the period in which Shakespeare was writing. It refers to the revival of interest in ancient Latin and Greek writings that occurred in the Italy of the 1300s and spread across Europe over the following two centuries.

Satire

A genre of literature, dating back to ancient Greek and Roman times, that involves criticism and mockery of human foolishness and wrongdoing.

Syllogism

A logical method of making arguments that Shakespeare would have heard about at school. A syllogism involves three statements: two statements agreed to be true (‘premises’) and a third that follows logically from the other two (a conclusion). For example: ‘Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It* and *Hamlet* (first premise). *As You Like It* and *Hamlet* are plays (second premise). Therefore Shakespeare wrote plays (conclusion)’.

References

Auden, W. H. (2002) *Lectures on Shakespeare*, Kirsch, A. (ed.), Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.

Barber, C. L. (1972 [1959]) *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.

Bate, J. (1994) *Shakespeare and Ovid*, Clarendon, Oxford.

Belsey, C., Demoor, M. and Pieters, J. (2000) 'Discursive desire: Catherine Belsey's feminism', *Feminist Review*, vol. 66, no. 1, pp. 23–45.

Congleton, J. E. and Brogan, T. V. F. (1993) 'Pastoral', in Preminger, A. and Brogan, T. V. F. (eds) *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, pp. 885–8.

Cooper, H. (1977) *Pastoral: Medieval into Renaissance*, Ipswich, D. S. Brewer.

Erne, L. (2003) *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Gardner, H. (1959) 'As you like it', in Gilman, A. (ed.) *As You Like It*, New York, New American Library, pp. 203–21.

Greenblatt, S. (2005) *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, London, Pimlico.

Jones, E. (1971) *Scenic Form in Shakespeare*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Kermode, F. (2001) *Shakespeare's Language*, London, Penguin.

Miola, R. S. (2000) *Shakespeare's Reading*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Open Source Shakespeare (n.d.) *As You Like It* [Online]. Available at http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/playmenu.php?WorkID=asyoulikeit (Accessed 28 September 2016).

Rudd, N. (1979) (trans.) *The Satires of Horace and Persius*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

Shakespeare, W. (1623) *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies: Published According to the True Original Copies*, London, Isaac Jaggard and Ed. Blount. Available at http://firstfolio.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ (Accessed 28 September 2016).

Shakespeare, W. (2006) *As You Like It*, Dusinberre, J. (ed.), Arden Shakespeare series, London, Thomson.

Shakespeare, W. (2009) *As You Like It*, Hattaway, M. (ed.), New Cambridge Shakespeare series, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Shapiro, J. (2005) *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, London, Faber & Faber.

Smith, B. R. (1994) *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics*, Chicago, Chicago University Press.

van Es, B. (2013) *Shakespeare in Company*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Acknowledgements

This free course was written by Jonathan Gibson, adapted from original text by Richard Danson Brown.

Except for third party materials and otherwise stated (see terms and conditions), this content is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 Licence.

The material acknowledged below is Proprietary and used under licence (not subject to Creative Commons Licence). Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources for permission to reproduce material in this free course:

Images
Course image: © MatiasEnElMundoi/Stock/Getty Images Plus

Image in video in Activity 5: © Bridgeman Images

Every effort has been made to contact copyright owners. If any have been inadvertently overlooked, the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

Don't miss out

If reading this text has inspired you to learn more, you may be interested in joining the millions of people who discover our free learning resources and qualifications by visiting The Open University – www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses.