

John Salinsky

Medicine and Literature

The doctor's companion to the classics

VOLUME 2



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**Forewords by Roger Neighbour
and Robert Coles**

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the classics

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John Salinsky



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Foreword

When the American poet (and novelist and storyteller and essayist) William Carlos Williams was not at his desk ‘scrawling on paper’, as he once put it, he was busy living the daily life of a physician – seeing patients in his Rutherford, New Jersey office, or going on home visits to the many ailing children he saw, or the grown-ups whose difficulties he also attended to. I was privileged to accompany this ‘writing doctor’ (as some of us called him sometimes) and to sit in his office and hear him reflect on what it meant to work at making life a bit better for his fellow human beings who were sick for one reason or another. One day, as he took to remembering particular times of trial and strain – children hurting, even dying, and their parents devastated – he turned the table round, addressed his own personal struggles as one who so relentlessly saw life’s grim side, and he did so not out of ‘unreflecting egoism’ (as George Eliot put it in *Middlemarch*) but in an earnest, and yes humble, effort to figure out (and declare for a young physician just starting out in his professional life) what helped him keep his spirits reasonably high as a doctor, amid the melancholy that came his way all the time. A lowering of the head, a stare through a nearby window at a street he knew so well, a sigh that set the stage for the deeply felt words that followed: ‘A lot of talk these days [1955] of psychology – talk of what’s going on when you treat patients (in them or in you, the doc they’ve come to see). I read all that, and I say “sure thing” to myself; but I’ll tell you, when I want to know the real rock bottom truth about what happens all the time in this doctoring life, what happens to us

using our stethoscopes and our neurological hammers, and what happens to the folks who bring us their hearts and worries to be heard, their nerves to be tested, or their observer upstairs, called “the mind” to be evaluated – that’s when I turn, every time, to the novelists, the playwrights, the poets, the essayists, who have given us the sights and sounds, the feel of all that goes on, minute by minute, in what we doctors call the clinical encounter: the ups and downs of hope that fades into alarm, worry, unnerving fear; and the shifts of trust, of outright distrust – so much to observe, to keep in mind, as we try to understand what it means to be a practising doctor, or a needy, vulnerable patient. What Tolstoy and Chekhov knew we need to know for ourselves, for our own sakes, as we live out our medical lives. After all, writers like those two, and others, are our lifelong teachers, advisors, friends.’

What Dr Williams asserted with evident insistence, even passion, all of us who have become physicians have reason to know, and to know inwardly with gratitude, upon meeting the pages of this carefully assembled, wonderfully telling book – a ‘companion’ for sure, a lasting and most helpful one, for the medical travelling that awaits us.

Robert Coles MD
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November 2003

Foreword

It's odd – or is it? – how many great writers of fiction were (or planned to be) doctors. From Chekhov and Bulgakov to Somerset Maugham, Richard Gordon and Jed Mercurio – the line extends. Odd, too – or is it? – how many doctors are (or want to be) creative writers. I suspect that the medical profession has more than its expected share of novels in its collective bottom drawer, if not actually on publishers' lists.

Why should this be? At first sight you'd have thought the jobs of authorship and medicine were incompatible. Being a doctor means working out there in the world's blood and misery with the sleeves rolled up. We suppose that the writer, by contrast, inhabits a solitary and sheltered inner world, where the life of the imagination teems with no less turbulence, but silently, invisibly, evidenced only by the quiet patterns of ink upon page.

Yet both are wrestling with the same universal conundrum: how to make sense of the human condition as people – patients or characters – struggle in the relentless grip of their destiny. To be sure, author and doctor express their insights differently, the one in language, the other in action. But both professions are predicated upon a similar depth of understanding, and neither has lasting merit without it.

In the 1960s, the Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki gave a series of seminars to students in Los Altos, California. 'Each of us must make his own true way,' he said, 'and when we do, that way will express the universal way. When you understand one thing through and through, you understand everything. When you try

to understand everything, you will not understand anything. The best way is to understand yourself, and then you will understand everything.¹

In this paradox we can discern an answer to the question begged by John Salinsky's books about books: 'Why bother?' More specifically, given all the medical textbooks, journals, guidelines and information that cascade onto our desks and screens and compete for our leisure moments, what is to be gained from time spent in a fictional universe? Will it make us better doctors? Surely it will. The novelist has the luxury of exploring and communicating a near-complete understanding of one particular microcosm, uncomplicated by real-life entanglements. To the extent that we can identify with a well-drawn fictional character, we can, as Suzuki enjoins us, understand that one 'self' through and through, and thereby hone our understanding of all the other selves we encounter professionally.

The most fundamental of all consulting skills is genuine curiosity about other people, the constant urge to wonder 'Why are they as they are?' In the words of another Zenist, Martine Batchelor, 'The most important part of the question is not the meaning of the words themselves but the question mark.'² We should open our minds to the life of the imagination not just for its entertainment value, but for the mindset of curiosity it engenders in us. Such books as John Salinsky describes in this and his previous volume combine powerful opportunities for our own professional growth with pleasure and recreation too. What could be better?

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November 2003

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- 2 Batchelor M (1999) *Principles of Zen*. Thorsons, London.

About the authors

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Wai-Ching Leung is a doctor working in general practice and public health. He also has an interest in medical education and has written about it in the *British Medical Journal*. In the last few years he has developed a passion for literature and is now studying it for an MA degree at the Open University.

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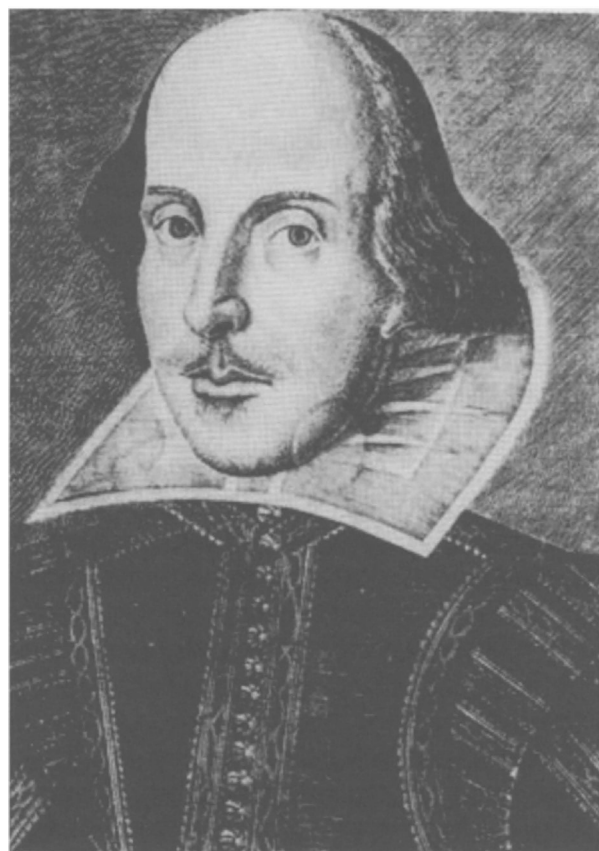
Alistair Stead has recently retired from the School of English at the University of Leeds, where he lectured on English and American literature.



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Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to be able to introduce a second collection of essays on some favourite literary classics, which I would like to share with you. As I said in my introduction to the first volume, I think we should read these books chiefly because they are so enjoyable. They will all provide wonderful refreshment for our spirits after a hard day in the surgery or the clinic. In addition, we may find that the classic books can give us fresh insights into the minds of the people who crowd in daily, seeking our attention. The great writers have a marvellous ability simply to describe what it is to be human: to live in a vast and sometimes unfriendly world and to share it with other human beings for whom we develop powerful and mysterious feelings.

At first sight, the characters in a classic novel may seem to live in a different universe from the patients in the consulting room. They are more heroic or more villainous; they are preoccupied with philosophical questions or caught up in terrifying obsessions. Their lives and loves and intrigues seem much more interesting and exciting than those of people in 'real life'. But if we look carefully, we find that our patients are not so different. They too have love affairs and suffer from overwhelming yearnings, desires and jealousies. They are prone to introspection and wondering why on earth a terrible blow has happened to them. They have ambitions and compulsions; they want to get rich or avenge injustice; they have their dreams and their nightmare visions. If I am getting bored or restless in a consultation, I sometimes try to detach myself and listen to my patient in a slightly different way, as if I were reading about him in a novel. Of course, it doesn't always make a difference, but when it does, it can make my sinking heart revive and beat in sympathy with that of a fellow

human being. So it is my hope, and that of my fellow contributors, that you will not only enjoy reading our recommendations in your precious spare time but be able to use the experience to enhance your understanding of your patients.

Let me now tell you about the books we have chosen for this second volume. You will notice that we have introduced works by new authors (such as Joseph Conrad, Herman Melville, DH Lawrence and Virginia Woolf) and also revisited some of our old friends from the original *Medicine and Literature* to see what else they have written. William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Leo Tolstoy and Franz Kafka make welcome reappearances, and the Brontë sisters are represented by Charlotte instead of Emily.

This time there are shorter works, which may be welcome news for those who get nervous when presented with a massive tome. However, in this collection, brevity does not mean insignificance: the short stories and novels discussed here are some of the greatest works of literature the world will ever see. We have not just one but three stories by Kafka. As well as *The Metamorphosis* (the one about the man who becomes a beetle), I will be telling you about two less well-known but equally unforgettable stories written near the end of Kafka's life. Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is a good deal shorter than *Anna Karenina*, but its impact is stunning. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is another compressed masterpiece, which has influenced many subsequent writers (and film makers) but remains unequalled. I would also say, in defence of great short books, that if you finish one before your journey ends, you can not do better than to start again at the beginning. You will be rewarded by fresh insights and unexpected revelations, even if you thought you had read every word.

Although the average length of the books in this volume is shorter than in the first, you will notice that many of the chapters are longer. Why should this be, I wondered. I have been writing about the classics for a few years now and during that time my approach has undergone a change. I seem to go more deeply into the books and stay there longer. I spend more time relishing the details and working out what is going on. In my presentations to my readers, I find I can no longer skim over parts of the plot that don't seem to matter. Everything now seems more likely to

be there for a purpose. And there is another reason for my longer chapters. In the first volume, I wanted to share with you the books that were old favourites. This volume also contains faithful companions from the bedside table, but I have added some books by writers whom I have always respected but found difficult. I thought it was time to find out whether my increased age and exposure to life had made me more receptive. Conrad is a good example of a writer whose style I always found hard going. Perhaps that's why I chose his shortest novel to begin with. I didn't think 100 pages would detain me long, but I was wrong. I spent a long time in the jungle with the old sea captain going up that terrible river, and I was a changed person when I came out. I had seen into the depths of the abyss. I had also learned how to read very slowly. I think that was the key.

Another great writer whose books I was never able to finish in my teens is DH Lawrence. I loved the musicality of his language but was defeated by the apparent waywardness of his characters and the strangeness of his ideas. I decided to tackle *Women in Love*, which the professionals agree is his greatest and most typically Lawrentian book. *Sons and Lovers* would have been much easier but I wanted to go for the big challenge on your behalf. So I immersed myself in Lawrence's world. I learned about his life, I read his letters and what his friends and enemies have had to say about him over the years. I read some of his other books. And I really got to know those women in love (and their men). When I emerged I had added the book to my list of all time favourites. I felt almost as if I had spent time with Lawrence in person. We had been for long country walks, talked earnestly, warmed to each other, got drunk in pubs, disagreed violently, tried to understand each other and ended up as firm friends (although my other friends think he's a bit weird). I would like you to read Lawrence too, especially if you never have. I don't want you to go through as big a struggle as I did, and I hope that my personal discoveries about *Women in Love* will make the journey much easier for you than it was for me.

In complete contrast, I have also included Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, a book that delighted me with its ruthless wit when I was an undergraduate. But when I reread it more recently,

I found there were some chapters that made me feel morally queasy. Does this mean I was wrong to enjoy it? I want you to read it too and help me to make a judgement.

So much for the literature, what about the medicine? You will by now be well aware that we do not restrict ourselves to books about doctors and patients, because all accounts of human lives will resonate with the lives of those who pass in and out of our consulting rooms. Nevertheless, doctors must and will make their appearance on the literary stage and we can't fail to be fascinated by the problems they create for themselves. Would I have behaved like that, we wonder, when a fictional doctor does something shameful and embarrassing? Surely not. Well perhaps, but only on a really bad day Our most spectacular fictional doctors are Victor Frankenstein and Henry Jekyll. Both of these larger-than-life colleagues will be sure to evoke your compassion even if you decide not to follow their research interests. Why is it, I wonder, that writers tend to choose a medical man when they want to portray a hero who recklessly meddles with nature and brings about catastrophe? Perhaps it is because our patients regard us with a certain ambivalence: look at the public unease over the genetic manipulation of human embryos. Some of us may combine scientific ingenuity with demonic powers. Does your kindly family doctor have a mad gleam in his eye? What is he cooking up in his home laboratory?

Disturbing in a different way is Ivan Turgenev's formidable Doctor Eugene Bazarov from *Fathers and Sons*. Strictly speaking, Bazarov is not yet fully qualified, but he is already a ruthless advocate of evidence-based medicine. And he shocks the older generation with his contemptuous dismissal of their cherished values. All the same, he is a conscientious doctor and he can be kind and generous; I think you will find that you have a soft spot for him too.

The doctor as a minor character pops up all over the place, giving us the pleasure of comparing our consultation style with his. In Jane Austen's *Emma* we shall hear about the devoted local GP, Mr Perry, whose patience with the heartsinking Mr Woodhouse will evoke your grudging admiration. Some of our other patients are not so lucky: poor Ivan Ilyich gets very

indifferent palliative care from both GP and oncologist, and Virginia Woolf's Septimus Warren Smith receives deplorable treatment from the eminent psychiatrist Sir William Bradshaw. Look out for cameo doctor appearances in *Jane Eyre*, *Moby-Dick* and *Heart of Darkness*. Finally, we must not forget Dr Aziz in *A Passage to India*. Although we never see him at work (I'm sure he is very patient-centred) we shall be totally involved in his struggles with his own emotions and with the British Raj.

In my encounters with some of the characters described within, I have been unable to resist the temptation to play the doctor myself. You may think this is out of order, since I am not licensed to practise in their world, and most of the characters have not even declared themselves as patients. Despite these objections (which I fully accept), I have offered diagnostic speculations about Jaques (*As You Like It*), Mr Kurtz (*Heart of Darkness*), Gerald Crich (*Women in Love*) and the unnamed subterranean creature in Kafka's story *The Burrow*.

Many other deeply disturbed characters are also to be found in our chosen books. Whether they would agree to a psychiatric referral or even a few sessions with the practice counsellor I could not say. But, extreme as these people are, I feel sure that we all have patients in our surgeries and clinics who resemble them closely. Of course, they will not be consulting us about their mental state; they will be more concerned with the behaviour of their spouses, their need for our signature on a dubious document or the rebellious state of their inner organs.

Look out for Captain Ahab, who is preoccupied with a long-standing feud which he seems determined to pursue to the death. Keep a spare appointment for little Jane Eyre, whose anxiety over her reckless older boyfriend will have produced all sorts of psychosomatic symptoms. What about that poor Mr Samsa, whose life has never been the same since he woke up one morning unable to use his legs properly or to speak? Here's a Russian man worried about the dangerous friend his son has taken up with at the university. Even the strange people from *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, with their morbid obsessions, bizarre behaviour and inability to communicate, will manage to find their way through the Colombian jungle to the surgery in the clearing.

The stories and novels cover a generous time span, and this time I have placed them in chronological order. I hope you approve. The romantics of the nineteenth century are well represented, closely followed by the modernists of the early twentieth. Love, death and family relationships preoccupy many of our characters; others are caught up in the single-minded pursuit of an idea, an ambition or the thirst for revenge. The problems and moral ambiguities of Empire are discussed in *Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India*. The shadow of the Great War looms over *Women in Love* and *Mrs Dalloway*.

As in the previous volume, I am delighted to welcome the contributions of my fellow enthusiasts for medicine and literature. Wai-Ching Leung introduces us to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and her tragic alter ego Septimus Smith. Gillie Bolton writes about Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, whose unhappy monster is more human than you might think. And Brian Glasser describes the 'strange case' of RL Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and their translation from the page to the screen. Aziz Sheikh supplies a thoughtful postscript from a different perspective to my essay on *A Passage to India*. Once again, I would like to thank Alistair Stead for his careful reading of the manuscripts and his valuable advice on everything from punctuation to interpretation. Alistair has also contributed his own postscripts to the chapters on Kafka and Tolstoy.

We begin with Shakespeare: another piece inspired by a visit with my GP registrars to the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park, London, on a summer's evening. The stage is set so I shall not detain you any further, but, borrowing a phrase from Rosalind, I charge you to like as much of the play (and the rest of the book) as please you.

Happy reading.

As You Like It

by William Shakespeare
(1599)

If you read the first volume of *Medicine and Literature*, you may remember that I was inspired to write about a Shakespeare comedy by a visit to the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park, London, with my course organiser colleague Caroline Dickinson, and our little band of GP registrars. On that occasion the play was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and we all enjoyed it so much that 'Shakespeare in the Park' became a regular summer event. Last year we went to see *As You Like It*, and we liked it very much in spite of the chilly July weather and a brisk downpour in the first five minutes.

I wrote a synopsis for the registrars to read beforehand and it forms the basis of this account. With *A Midsummer Night's Dream* I felt obliged to pick out a few medical themes in the play; but now that we all believe in the importance of medical humanities there can no longer be any doubt that Shakespeare should be given an honoured place in the curriculum. So imagine yourselves sitting (warmly wrapped up please) in the park on an English summer's evening, full of eager anticipation. The play is about to begin.

The action is set partly in a ducal court and mainly in the idyllic landscape of the Forest of Arden. The play's themes include whether it's more fun to live in the town or the country and whether it's better to be a romantic or a cynic. But mainly it's about love.

Trouble at court: brothers behaving badly

The opening scenes of the play are used to get us up to speed with what Hollywood calls 'the back story', or what has been happening before the play begins. Shakespeare does this in a fairly obvious way by getting the characters to ask each other: 'What's the news at the new court?' The fact is that he doesn't want to waste too much effort on the machinery of the plot because his main aim is to get the characters away from court and into the Forest of Arden, where they can get in touch with their feelings.

The play starts in Duke Frederick's orchard, where we find our young hero, Orlando, complaining to his faithful old servant Adam about the shabby way his elder brother, Oliver, has treated him since their father's death. It seems that Oliver has denied him a proper education and brought him up as a peasant instead of a gentleman. Adam listens patiently, like the good old retainer he is. A little later in the scene we learn, from a conversation between Oliver and Charles, the court wrestler, that the old Duke (Senior) has been deposed by his younger brother Frederick and banished to the country. Several sympathetic lords have gone with him, but his daughter, Rosalind, has been allowed to stay at court because of her close friendship with her cousin Celia, the bad Duke's daughter. Charles the wrestler tells Oliver that his little brother is planning to get into the ring with him at tomorrow's tournament. Charles doesn't think this is wise and is worried that he might kill or maim Orlando. But wicked old Oliver says by all means kill him: 'I would as lief you did break his neck as his finger'.

Two girls watch a wrestling match

In scene two, we meet the two cousins, Rosalind and Celia. Rosalind is a little subdued because her father, the old Duke, has just been banished. They have an encounter with Touchstone, the court jester, who engages them in some very obscure Shakespearian clown banter about pancakes and mustard. It's not actually very funny but I promise you his act improves after he has had a chance to warm up.

Then they get ready for the wrestling. They hear that the fearsome Charles has already crushed the ribs of three young brothers, and when Orlando appears the girls try to persuade him not to fight. Naturally, Orlando insists on going on with the bout and we actually get to watch. I don't know what sort of wrestling they did at the Globe in Shakespeare's time, but modern producers tend to go for American-style dirty wrestling of the kind that you may come across as you flick idly through the more disreputable cable or satellite TV channels. There are usually lots of drop kicks, forearm jabs and Boston crabs. I can't imagine where I learned all these terms. The fight is very realistic and quite exciting and, against all the odds, it is Orlando who wins. The girls are thrilled, and Rosalind gives him her chain to wear around his neck. She is very taken with him, and in our production their eyes meet meaningfully for several tingling seconds. Rosalind really would like to hang around and chat to him a bit longer, but Celia tugs her away. Orlando is furious with himself for becoming stupefied and forgetting all his usual chat-up lines.

When the two girls are alone, Rosalind goes very quiet and Celia realises that she has fallen in love. She tries a few puns to get her to lighten up a bit ('come, come, wrestle with thy affections') but Rosalind is seriously smitten. Just then the bad Duke (Celia's father) appears and tells Rosalind that she is banished too and should pack her bags at once. Celia says that she and Rosalind are inseparable, and if Rosalind has to go, Celia will jolly well go with her. Worsted by the two teenagers, the Duke stalks off angrily while our heroines resolve to join Rosalind's father and his merry men in the Forest of Arden. Rosalind decides that, for their greater protection, she will dress up as a boy and call herself 'Ganymede'. 'Now go we in consent,' says Celia, 'to liberty and not to banishment.'

Into the forest

Now we have reached Act 2 and the scene changes to the magical Forest of Arden. You can really feel the stress dissolving away as we leave the sordid intrigues and vicious plots of the court behind us. The season is probably winter but spring is just

around the corner – and so is love. The good old banished Duke (Rosalind's father) is telling his friends how much better life will be in the woods and fields. It's true that the winter wind can bite 'as the icy fang' when you are in the great outdoors, but no matter. We shall find, he says, 'tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything'. One of the nice things about watching a Shakespeare play is that you keep hearing and happily recognising wonderful quotations. There will be lots more in this play and I will be glad to signpost a few of them.

Meanwhile, back at the Court, the wicked Duke Frederick orders a search party to bring back the runaway girls and also to round up Orlando, who, he is led to believe, has gone to join them. The faithful servant Adam warns Orlando to get out of town quick and offers to come with him. Orlando wonders what they will do for money. Old Adam rather recklessly offers the young master the sum of 500 crowns, which must represent his entire pension fund. And so, more than adequately resourced, our young man and his old companion set off to join the other fugitives in the country.

Cutting swiftly back to the forest, we come upon Rosalind and Celia, accompanied by Touchstone, the clown. Rosalind is now disguised as a boy and we are meant to accept the convention that not even her father or her lover can recognise her. I will remind you that, at the Globe Theatre, the women's parts were all played by boys, which may account for the frequency of cross-dressing by Shakespearian heroines. However, our Rosalind's trousers, leather braces and short haircut will only enhance her feminine appeal in the best pantomime principal boy tradition. All the men in the audience will be in love with her and, I dare say, some of the women too. And the gay men will be in love with *him*, if you see what I mean.

Act 3: town versus country

In the next few scenes we have more opportunities to watch the court folk reacting to life in the country. Now we have a little musical interlude ('Under the greenwood tree, Who loves to lie

with me') provided by a singer called Amiens, who is part of the Duke's travelling entourage. Listening to the song is the gloomy courtier, Jaques (pronounced Jay-queese). He cajoles Amiens to sing some more. The singer warns him: 'It will make you melancholy, Monsieur Jaques.' But Jaques replies, 'I can suck melancholy out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs. More, I prithee, more.'

Later, when the Duke and the courtiers wander in, Jaques tells them about his meeting in the forest with Touchstone, and says he wouldn't mind being a licensed fool himself so that he could make fun of people and expose their sins and follies with impunity. Then he could 'cleanse the foul body of th'infected world'. The Duke observes that his friend was something of a hell raiser himself in his younger days and can scarcely claim to be pure. Jaques is not lost for a reply, but I think the thrust goes home. What are we to make of Jaques? He seems to be one of those very clever and rather unnerving people who stand around at parties making satirical remarks but never getting involved. He always has something smart to say about human weakness and he appears to be very cynical and sneering. But underneath the mask he is quite vulnerable. He is always called 'melancholy', and I think he is quite depressed. His saving grace is that he still finds the world interesting.

Now who is this staggering dramatically into the forest clearing to interrupt the Duke's picnic? It is Orlando, who is tired, hungry and desperate. At first he demands food with menaces; but the Duke assures him that he is welcome to join them and he calms down. Orlando asks permission to go and get Adam, whom he has left, exhausted, a little further back. The truth is that while Adam is very game, he is over 80, for goodness sake, and is really a bit too decrepit to be taken on strenuous hikes through the forest.

The seven ages of man: a jaundiced view?

At this point Jaques comes out with his famous 'Seven Ages of Man' speech, which many of us had to learn at school and can still recite fragments of. I am sure you remember that it starts with 'the infant mewling and puking in the nurse's arms' and proceeds via the reluctant schoolboy, the sighing lover, the swearing soldier,

the fat pompous justice and 'the lean and slippered pantaloons' to the final late geriatric stage: 'sans eyes, sans teeth, sans taste, sans everything'. In the production we saw, this last line is delivered with a meaning look at old Adam, who is lying on the ground, looking more dead than alive. However, he does recover, and is able to tuck into some much-needed breakfast. So is Jaques' depressing version of the human life story to be taken seriously? In each of the seven ages, human beings are seen as being miserable or ruthlessly self-serving or both. As a later cynic put it: 'Life is shit and then you die.'

But it doesn't have to be like that, does it? I mean, it's true you die in the end, but you can have a lot of fun along the way and even feel you have achieved a thing or two before it's time to meet your maker, if indeed that is what happens. I think we doctors all see someone like Jaques in the surgery now and then and find him very entertaining. But when he goes on his lonely way again we feel a tinge of sadness. Perhaps he needs some cognitive behavioural therapy.

Love poems on the trees

Now, I am happy to say, the mood changes and the romantic comedy really gets going. Who is this hanging love poems on all the trees and incising them on their trunks? It is young Orlando, who is now looking forward to a different and more delightful kind of wrestling. But before we get Rosalind's response, Shakespeare deftly inserts the cynical view with a conversation between Touchstone and Corin, an old shepherd. Corin praises the innocence of country life, but Touchstone (whose wit is warming up in the sun) points out that a shepherd is little better than a brothel-keeper who earns his living by procuring young she-lambs for dirty old rams.

Now enter Rosalind (in her boy's clothes) and Celia to find the trees covered with rather bad verses in praise of Rosalind:

*From the east to western Ind,
No jewel is like Rosalind.*

And Touchstone mockingly offers:

*If a hart do lack a hind,
Let him seek out Rosalind.*

Celia reads out a long verse and Rosalind pretends to be embarrassed (although she is really quite excited). She demands to know who the writer is, and Celia, after some teasing, reveals that he is Orlando. Rosalind is impatient and full of questions: 'What said he? How looked he? Wherein went he? What makes he here? Did he ask for me? Where remains he? How parted he with thee? And when shalt thou see him again? Answer me in one word.'

When Orlando himself appears, Rosalind decides to keep her male identity for the time being ('I will speak to him like a saucy lackey') and test the strength of Orlando's love; always a prudent thing for a girl to do. She teases the poor boy with some amazing wordplay (or is it foreplay?). She dazzles him with a brilliant speech about the way time moves at different speeds for different people: 'I'll tell you who Time ambles withal, who Time trots withal, who Time gallops withal, and who he stands still withal.'

She tells him that he can't really be in love because he doesn't look the part. Everyone knows that a young man in love has:

a lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and sunken, which you have not; an unquestionable spirit, which you have not; a beard neglected, which you have not Then your hose should be ungartered, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbuttoned, your shoe untied, and everything about you demonstrating a careless desolation. But you are no such man: you are rather point-device in your accoutrements, as loving yourself, than seeming the lover of any other.

Girls, whenever you encounter a young fellow who is really sharply dressed, without a hair out of place, you should confuse him by telling him that he is 'point-device in his accoutrements'.

Bending the gender

Orlando protests that he really is in love with Rosalind (whom, of course, he fails to recognise in her trousers). The strange youth offers to cure him of love by a special form of therapy. He will have to play a game in which 'Ganymede' pretends to be Rosalind and gives Orlando a really hard time by constantly changing 'her' moods: 'now like him, now loathe him; then entertain him, then forswear him, now weep for him, then spit at him'. Orlando says he doesn't want to be cured, but he accepts the offer 'with all my heart, good youth'. 'Nay,' says his mentor, 'you must call me Rosalind.'

Orlando goes along with the charade, ensuring that the fun continues. But is he really fooled? He must 'know' at some unconscious level that Ganymede is really Rosalind. Let me confuse you further by reminding you that Rosalind/Ganymede was played by a boy actor until the Restoration, when women actors were allowed on the stage for the first time. They seized joyfully on the part of Rosalind and naturally have been unwilling to give it up ever since, although there have recently been some all-male productions of *As You Like It*. Being disguised as a boy liberates Rosalind and enables her to take the leading role in the relationship. Orlando was in love with her when she was a conventional young woman, but he must be even more entranced with this witty, pretty, sparkling, energetic boy-girl with a heart – just as we all are.

So is he in love with a boy or a girl? And does she appeal to a gay, boy-loving part of his nature? Or is her boyishness essentially feminine, whatever that means? And what difference does it make if, as in Shakespeare's time, Rosalind is 'really' a boy? I shall return to the gender question before we finish, but meanwhile, don't bother your pretty heads about it – just enjoy the show.

More lovers and their problems

Next we have an interlude for another pair of lovers. Touchstone, the jester, has found himself a simple country wench called

Audrey, whom he is determined to marry, quite undeterred by the major differences in their interests and background. I am afraid he is rather coarse and lacking in spirituality. Audrey seems not to mind.

We then take a look at a third, and rather stormy, relationship, that of Silvius, the young shepherd, and Phebe, a shepherdess, who does not (yet) return his affections. Rosalind (as Ganymede) gives Phebe a good telling off for being too proud to accept an offer from such a fine young fellow as Silvius. She tells Phebe bluntly that a girl in her position is not likely to find anyone better in a rural community. 'Down on your knees,' she admonishes, 'and thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love.' Is Rosalind really giving herself the same advice? At any rate, the unexpected result is that poor little Phebe immediately gets a crush on Ganymede/Rosalind: 'I had rather hear you chide than this man woo.' 'I pray you do not fall in love with me,' retorts Rosalind, 'for I am falser than vows made in wine. Besides I like you not.' Well, that's plain enough. But, of course, the besotted Phebe takes no notice. True, Ganymede has been rather rough with her, but he is *very* good looking. She tells poor Silvius (now reduced to the role of confidant) that some girls might have fallen in love with such a devastatingly rude youth but not her: she is going to write Ganymede a scathing letter (which Silvius is to deliver).

Act 4: a lesson in love

Orlando turns up a little late for his first appointment with the love therapist, whom he still fails to recognise as his Rosalind. After warning him not to be late again, she relents and gets him to practise his love talk: 'Come woo me, woo me: for now I am in a holiday humour and like enough to consent. What would you say to me now, an I were your very, very Rosalind?' Orlando says, 'I would kiss before I spoke', which is a good answer, and the lesson goes really well. 'Rosalind' proposes a mock marriage, with Celia officiating as priest. Rosalind warns him that she will be a very jealous and often annoying wife. Orlando is not a bit discouraged. Then he says he must be excused for two hours

while he has dinner with the Duke. Rosalind pretends to be disillusioned with him and makes him promise not to be late back. After he has gone, Celia reproves Rosalind for bringing the female sex into disrepute by her antics. In a famous, heart-stopping revelation of her true feelings, Rosalind comes back with: 'O coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathoms deep I am in love!'

After another interlude for a song, events move on quickly. Silvius presents Rosalind with Phebe's 'chiding' letter – which is really a declaration of love. Rosalind tells Silvius to make a more determined pitch for Phebe himself and not be 'a tame snake'. Now in comes Orlando's wicked elder brother Oliver, with a rather improbable tale to tell. It seems that while he was asleep under an oak tree, a lioness crept up on him and would have killed him had not young Orlando leapt out to his defence and killed the animal in fierce single combat. Perhaps the Forest of Arden is a more dangerous place than we thought. Orlando was wounded by the lioness's claws and Oliver had to staunch the flow of blood. He shows them 'the bloody napkin' as proof and tells the two girls that Orlando has asked him to show it to 'the shepherd youth That he in sport doth call his "Rosalind" '. The sight of her beloved's blood makes Rosalind faint, but when she recovers she quickly tells Oliver that this was merely a 'counterfeit'. Nobody is fooled. Touched by his brother's heroism, bad Oliver now becomes good Oliver and is free to fall in love with Celia, who has been left single for long enough.

Act 5: all to be married tomorrow

In the first scene of the final act, we see the brothers Orlando and Oliver happily reconciled after their adventure with the lioness. Oliver is going to marry Celia the following day, and Orlando is getting impatient for some satisfaction of his own desire. 'I can live no longer by thinking,' he says, miserably. But 'Ganymede' (alias Rosalind) tells him she 'can do strange things' and he too will be married tomorrow. Silvius now enters with Phebe, who is still mooning over Ganymede and breaking her young shepherd's

heart. Silvius tells us, with simple, moving eloquence 'what love is':

*Silvius: It is to be all made of sighs and tears;
And so am I for Phebe.*
Phebe: And I for Ganymede.
Orlando: And I for Rosalind.
Rosalind: And I for no woman.

Silvius loves Phebe, Phebe loves Rosalind (whom she thinks is a boy) and Rosalind cunningly says she is in love 'with no woman'. The others all think it's a mess. But Rosalind is in complete control of the plot and she confidently guarantees that everyone will be appropriately paired off and married the next day. Her last word to Phebe is 'I will marry you if ever I marry woman, and I'll be married tomorrow.'

Of course, as we in the audience know, it's not really all that difficult. All Rosalind has to do is to change back into a frock and everything will become clear. But before that happens Shakespeare throws in a few more diversions for our enjoyment. Two pages sing a well-known song ('It was a lover and his lass'). Then Touchstone introduces his bride-to-be, Audrey, to Jaques and the Duke, describing her rather unkindly as 'a poor virgin, sir, an ill-favoured thing, sir, but mine own'. Touchstone follows with a final set piece of jester's wit, describing the seven phases of a quarrel and how to avoid a quarrel turning into a fight. It's full of wonderful technical terms such as 'the Reproof Valiant' and 'the Counter-check Quarrelsome'.

At last Rosalind and Celia reappear and Rosalind is again wearing a skirt (sad to say). All four couples are now appropriately united in a ceremony performed by 'a masquer' representing Hymen, the Roman god of marriage. In a final piece of plot-spinning good news, we are told that the bad Duke Frederick has now seen the error of his ways (he was 'converted' by 'an old religious man' whom he met in the forest) and is now happy to let the good Duke Senior reclaim the crown. So that's all right. We don't have to stay in the forest, we can all go back to court and live happily in comfort. Only Jaques decides that it would be